

A 863,790





EL
398.2
Ada

Adams, Julia Davis
The swords of the Viking

RELEASED BY

EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTER
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION BUILDING
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

The
Kings
in
rope
= 1000

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
ANN ARBOR MICHIGAN

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

LIBRARY
JUNIOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



*Ragnhild crept to his side and laid a golden ring in a
wound in his thigh . . .*

Davis, Julia

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
~~UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN~~
~~ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN~~

The Swords *of the* Vikings

Stories from the Works of
Saxo Grammaticus

Retold by:
JULIA DAVIS ADAMS

Illustrated by:
SUZANNE LASSEN

E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.
Publishers : : : New York

EDUCATIONAL MEDIA CENTER
ROOM 3014
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION BUILDING
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

Juv. Coll.

P2

7

.D26211

5979

1928

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS, COPYRIGHT, 1928
BY E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED :: PRINTED IN U.S.A.

First PrintingJuly, 1928
Second PrintingJuly, 1928
Third PrintingAugust, 1929
Fourth PrintingJuly, 1937

2477

JUV. COLL.
GIFT
SCH. OF ED.
1-15-86
3588646

C O N T E N T S

	PAGE
I THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING	3
1. The Golden Ring	3
2. An Enemy Forgiven	12
3. The Weariness of Peace . .	15
4. The Treacherous Daughter .	20
5. Hading Dies for a Friend . .	25
II THE WARRIOR PRINCESS	31
III THE DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAU- TIFUL	47
1. The Sword of Strength . . .	47
2. The Immortal Food	60
IV AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK . .	73
V UFFE THE SILENT	93
VI THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK	107
1. The Windowless House . . .	107
2. Frode the Great	120

[vii]

C O N T E N T S

	PAGE
VII STARKAD'S VOW	129
1. The Vow	129
2. The Princess Defended . . .	131
3. The King Avenged	142
VIII MODEST SYRITHE	149
IX THE FAITHFUL MAIDEN	161
X THE WHITE HOUND OF OLUFF .	175
XI THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL .	189
1. The World That Is	189
2. The World That Is To Be .	202
XII THE PERILS OF SIGRID	213
XIII A VIKING'S DEATH	223

ILLUSTRATIONS

*Ragnhild crept to his side and laid a golden ring
in a wound in his thigh Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE


*In the embers sat Amleth, brooding eyed, fashion-
ing bits of wood into the shape of hooks . 78*

Syrthe . . . did not feel the flame 154

*So passed King Hagen, into the open ocean, and
the long blue summer night 224*

Foreword

*"The hollow oak our palace is,
Our heritage, the sea"*

ITH these words Charles Kingsley began the first chapter of his immortal "Westward Ho," which strikingly describes the deeds of daring performed by the "Gentlemen Adventurers" of the Elizabethan period, and with the same couplet the present book of tales of the ancient Danish gods, vikings and semi-mythical kings may well begin also. Adapted especially for children, these stories from Saxo (wrongly called "Grammaticus" as he was essentially a chronicler) bring vividly before the reader the rugged and virile old days before individual prowess had been largely swamped by co-operation, and individual thinking had been forced to succumb

[xi]

FOREWORD

to arbitrary rules of procedure, made for every possible contingency.

The old Danish demi-gods and heroes described by Saxo the Chronicler have been neither modernized nor softened by the highly intelligent redaction of Julia Adams who, very wisely, has not sought to temper the rough and ready viking code. Furthermore, the vivid illustrations of Suzanne Raben-Lassen present to us the real spirit of the ancient times she portrays and show also the contrast between the age of personal daring and our own days of steam, oil and uplift.

In his account of the death of Balder the Beautiful, Saxo has departed radically from the usual version of the god's end and, of course, Saxo's Amleth is the prototype of the Shakespearean Hamlet who, in spite of the undoubtedly basic similarity between the two tales, resembles the Amleth of the ancient Danish record only in outline. It is now thought probable that the Amleth-Hamlet myth had an ancient eastern origin, as the

[xii]

FOREWORD

wronged prince, who saved his life and throne by feigning insanity, appears in Persia in prince Kei Chosro of Firdausi's *Shahnameh* (King's Book). The version of Shakespeare must have been built upon the legend as known to the Elizabethans through Francois de Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*.

It is also interesting to note that Queen Sigrid in "The Perils of Sigrid" was none other than the mother of Canute the Great, the celebrated Danish king of England.

Of the original collector of these tales, it will be sufficient to state here that Saxo Grammaticus (about 1150-1206 A.D.) was the first Danish chronicler and the secretary of the celebrated Danish Archbishop, Absalom, who encouraged Saxo to write his *Gesta Danorum* (Deeds of the Danes) or *Historica Danica* (Danish history), a full record of Danish kings and heroes almost down to the author's date.

While Saxo's work cannot be regarded as having great historic value, because, after

[xiii]

FOREWORD

the fashion of his day, he thoroughly confused tradition with genuine history, it is nevertheless a most interesting collection of data, embodying a valuable kernel of fact which may be used in modern accurate investigation.

While I was the Minister of the United States of America at Copenhagen, I had the pleasure of knowing both collaborators of the present work, and can congratulate the reading public that this book appears as the result of the combined efforts of these ladies. Mrs. Lassen is a Danish artist of recognized talent, a member of an ancient Danish noble family (Raben-Levetzau), while Mrs. Adams is thoroughly conversant with Danish matters, owing to her years of residence in Denmark and her admirable acquaintance with the language.

These stories, many of which are full of an unconscious humor, are presented in the book in chronological order and the work should certainly be included in all libraries

[xiv]

FOREWORD

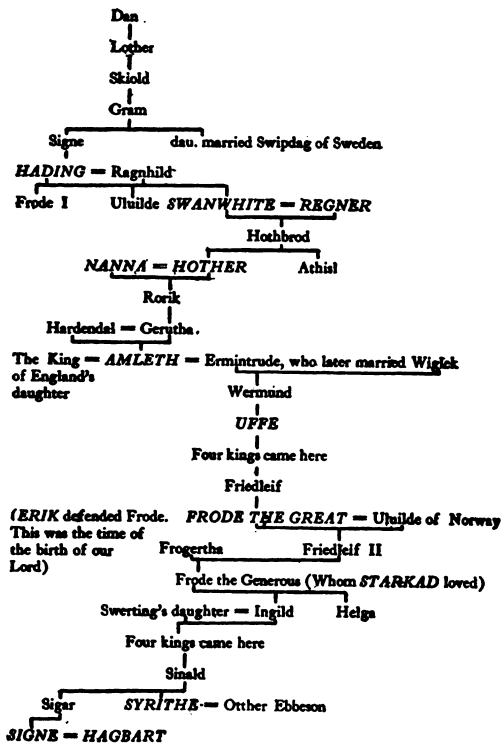
for children as an established source of historical and mythological information.

JOHN DYNELEY PRINCE

*Legation of the United States of America
Belgrade*

*Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.
Formerly United States Minister to Denmark.*

THE DESCENT OF THE KINGS



Here the Royal line was broken
and years passed by—

Harold Hildetand *OLUFF* won *ELSA* and joined his company
 |
 Osmund
 |
 Sinald II
 |
 Jarmerik, who wed a Grecian princess, and put her to death
 |
 Five kings came here
 ┌
 | *GORM*, the seeker of knowledge, whom *THORKILL* led
 |
 | Gotrik, who fought Pepin the Hammer, father of Charlemagne
 └
 |
 | And here followed eight kings
 |
 | Harold Blue Tooth
 ┌
 | *SVEND* = *SIGRID OF SWEDEN*
 └
 |
 | Canute the Great = Emma, dau. of Robert, Duke of Normandy

***THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF
HADING***



THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

I

The Golden Ring

LONG long ago, in the days when men were just beginning to remember the deeds of their kings, a ship sped over the waters which lay between the isles of Denmark and the coasts of Norway.

The ship was small, but dark and proud, and its oxhide sail was taut in the wind. Within its swelling sides fourteen hardy warriors bent singing to the oars, and behind the dragon's head carved on the high prow stood Hading, brave, young, and king of the Danes.

[3]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Hading was fifth to rule in Denmark, and those who came before the five kings are forgotten, for no bards sang them. But of Hading it is told that he was proud and fierce, and had a giantess for nurse. With her aid he won back his realm from Norway, and ever he shunned feasting, and ever he loved warfare, so that when he had no quarrels of his own he turned to righting the wrongs of his neighbors.

Now Hading stood, silent and straight behind the prow, and looked toward the nearing land with piercing eyes, and behind him sang his oarsmen as they dipped the oars in the blue water. Thus sang the oarsmen:

“Hail to Hading, King of Denmark,
Who now sails to free a maiden
From a wedding with a giant!

“Hail to Ragnhild, Norway’s princess,
Sung in three lands for her beauty,
Ill-betrothed by her hard father!

“Hading speeds to set her free.”

[4]

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

While the oarsmen sang, the boat touched on the shore of Norway, and Hading sprang from his place behind the high prow, and standing knee-deep in the water, bade farewell to his men.

"Return to Denmark," he said, "and tell no man ye brought me hither. Three days without food, and three nights without sleep, have I thought on the plight of hapless Ragnhild, and now it is in my mind to go alone, and free her from this betrothal."

So saying, he pushed the boat from the shore, and when it had disappeared on the shining water, he turned and made his way up the mountain to the house of the King of Norway. With head erect, Hading entered the hall, and saw the king, at the head of the board, talking with the giant Nither, and by his side the lovely Ragnhild, wan and trembling.

"Who might ye be," asked the king, "that comes unbidden to my daughter's bridal?"

"I come from the sea and the distant

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

shore," answered Hading, "for I am minded to put a stop to this loathsome wedding of a princess with a Nither."

At this the Nither rose up, howling, and waddled forth, wagging his bushy black head, and waving his long arms. Hading drew his sword, and the Nither, without stooping, scooped up two clubs, shod with iron, from the earthen floor. Whirling them round and round his head, he rushed at Hading.

Hading leapt to one side, and there followed a struggle so terrible that had he not been swift as well as strong, he must have perished. Round and round swept the clubs, and crashed on helm and shield. To and fro flashed the sword. Until Hading ran past the circling arms, and with one blow cut off the Nither's great round head, and withal fell himself, fainting from many wounds.

At this Ragnhild came swiftly down the hall, and looked on Hading where he lay, and bade them bring him to her chamber,

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

where she might tend his hurt. For days and nights she nursed him sweetly, and, as his strength returned, they talked together, but, out of modesty, he would not tell her who he was.

One night as he lay sleeping in the high dark bed, Ragnhild crept to his side, and looking fearfully over her shoulder to see that none espied her, she laid a golden ring in a wound in his thigh.

"Now," she thought, "the wound will heal about the ring, and I at least have set a mark upon him, whereby I shall know him from all other men, if we should ever meet again."

In time Hading waxed strong and went away, and Ragnhild stayed behind, dreaming always of the unknown champion who had come to her out of the sea. On fine days she would wander through the pinewoods, gazing down on the blue fjord, and hoping to see a proud ship come with sweeping oars. And ever she loved to ask herself what she liked most in him, the mercy he showed

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

her, in slaying her betrothed, or his skill at arms.

So passed long days, and longer years, until at last her father said,

“Daughter, enough of dreaming. Now I shall summon your suitors to a feast, and you may make your choice among them, but that very night I trow that you shall wed.”

And so the summons went to distant lands, and on the fateful night there were few mighty warriors who had not gathered for the feast. There were Gerbiorn, Gunbiorn, Arinbiorn, Stenbiorn, Esbiorn, Thorbiorn, and Biorn. There was the King of Sweden, and a host of sea kings. They sat and lay around the board, laughing and jesting as to which one should have the princess.

Then Ragnhild came in, and looked at them searchingly, and they fell silent.

After a time she said, “Father, faces may change, with weather, and the scars of battle. I have learned in a dream that I must wed only a man who is part made of gold. Give

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

me leave to go among them, and see if he be here."

"Go your way," answered her father.

"What manner of man might this be, who is part made of gold?" asked all the suitors among themselves.

Ragnhild came down from the high place, with the red of her cloak shining like a flame among them, and went from man to man, feeling their thighs.

"I will give you a golden crown," said the King of Sweden, when she came to him.

"My arms are covered with golden rings, and my chests are filled with gold," said a sea king.

"My heart is full of the gold of love," said Biorn.

But Ragnhild shook her head sadly, and passed on, feeling each thigh in turn. Far down the hall, below the beam which marked the high seats from the low, sat one who took no part in the talking, but kept his face hidden beneath his hat. To him Ragnhild

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

came the last of all, and stood before him, drooping and weary. At last she sighed, and stretched out a trembling hand, but when she touched his thigh, her fingers closed about a golden ring!

Then Ragnhild, with a joyous smile, led him forth into the center of the hall.

"This must be my husband," she cried in ringing tones, "for all of you can see that he is in part made of gold."

The man took off his hat, and all the feasters stared at him, and saw the gleam of a golden ring, buried in the flesh of his leg. At this the warriors clashed their shields merrily together, and the King of Norway rose from his seat, and cried,

"Who may ye be, that now shall wed my daughter?"

"I am Hading, King of Denmark," came the answer. "Long years ago I saved her from a giant husband, and now I see that she has kept me in her heart as I have cherished her."

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

“Right gladly will I live and die with Hading,” said Ragnhild.

Then her father was glad to think that his daughter should wed with a king, and straightway the bridal was celebrated with rejoicings due their noble rank.

An Enemy Forgiven

THOUGH Hading's skill in battle won for him a bride, fair, faithful, and clever, it also made him many enemies, who were jealous of his fame. One of these was Uffe of Sweden, who hid a false heart under seeming friendship.

With fair and honied speeches he bade Hading and his warriors to a banquet in the dark woods near Upsala, and to the banquet Hading came. There in the forest stood a vast hall, and within was spread a noble feast, rich in ale and meat, but when Hading entered he beheld only one door, and that lower than a man's head, and so narrow that only one could pass through it at a time.

Hading said nothing, but seated himself as

[12]

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

far from that door as might be, and made merry with the rest. All within the hall of the narrow door were gay, and there was naught to mar the feasting, save that if ever one of Hading's men went out, he did not come back. At length Hading rose, and went about among the feasters, and as he went he felt the wall behind him with one hand.

So it was that he found at the back an opening hidden by a curtain of wolf skins, and while the mirth and shouting waxed louder, he slipped through this opening out of the firelight, into the dark and silent forest.

Within there was a ruddy blaze, laughter and singing, but without naught but the gaunt trees, silent under the snow, ringing them round. Hading moved quietly among the trees until he came to the front of the hall, and there he stopped unseen.

Before the narrow door stood the two tallest of Uffe's warriors, and in their hands were blood red swords. As Hading's men came out, stooping to pass the low and narrow

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS


door, their heads were silently sliced off, one by one, and the trampled snow was dark with blood under the moon.

When Hading saw this he did not delay, but fled with all speed into the black forest.

After many days of lonely wandering in the snow he came over the frozen harbor to Denmark, and there he made haste to gather an army and return. With his armed men he came upon false Uffe unawares, and slew him. Then Hading cast all hatred from his heart, and made haste to give his enemy a hero's burial. He burned down the dark hall where the feast had been, so that the flames reddened the snowy forest far and wide, but for Uffe he built a high mound.

Thus Hading generously showed that though in life he had been forced to fight with Uffe as an enemy, in death he loved him as a friend.

The Weariness of Peace

HEN Uffe had been slain none dared to come against Hading, and he dwelt peacefully at home, tilling his fields, until he could brook such a life no longer.

One day as he was pacing through the meadows, with Ragnhild keeping step behind him, he muttered to himself:

“Why should I linger here, where there is naught but dreary howling of wild beasts? I, who used to ride the waves, midst clash of arms. That was a man’s life, and truly it would be more candid and sincere if I went back to it.”

When gentle Ragnhild heard him, she tried to turn his mind from thoughts of war, saying,

[15]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

"Sweet are the green groves, where nightingales sing.

Wild is the sea, where gulls scream on the wing.
Days on the land give pleasure and loving,
But years on the sea show no respite from roving."

Hading, however, thought it shameful to be ruled by a woman, and went his way.

Looking about to see where he might come upon a war, he heard of Toste, a wicked man, who was harrying the poor in Jutland. In his haste to come there, and his pride and heedlessness, Hading neglected his spring sacrifice of a dusky victim to the god Frey, and the first fighting of the war went hard with him.

He met the foe on the blue water off the coast of Jutland, and both were quick to bring their ships to shore. The beach was full of pebbles, which cut the feet of Hading's men, and made them fall. Nevertheless, they gave back blow for blow, until the woods about the water rang with the clash of iron.

No man that day had time to mark the sun, or space to breathe.

[16]

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

As twilight fell Hading and one man, backing step by step, cut their way through to his ship, hewing down all who followed. When they had a moment's respite they scrambled in, unseen. Then Hading went to the prow, and peered out from behind it.

Up and down the beach he looked, and could see no more than six of his men, and each of them ringed round with ten of Toste's. Others of the foe were resting, and a band of them were making ready to dash at the ship, and hew it into bits.

Hading beckoned to his follower, slipped over the far side into a little boat that lay there, and set quickly out to sea.

About that time a silence fell on land, the silence of the dead. No more was any clang of axe on helm, or sword on shield, but all was still. Toste the Wicked sought for Hading among the slain, and found him not. Far on the sea, a little boat was rowing swiftly, and Toste saw it.

With a shout Toste ran to his ship, like

[17]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

lightning his men took the oars, and swift as serpents they skimmed the waves after the little boat. Hading looked over his shoulder, and saw that there was no time to lose.

"Can you swim?" he called to his follower.

"No!" screamed the wretched man, and Hading upset the boat.

Up came Toste, in his high swift ship, but he saw nothing, save the quiet water, gray in the twilight, and one silly little boat, bobbing upside down. Around it and around rowed Toste, but there came no sound from the little boat, as it floated idly to and fro, with the splash of the oars. Then Toste waited, and the sea grew smooth, and the boat lay still, and then he rowed away, thinking Hading drowned.


For a space the sea was empty, shining like pale glass, and the stars came out. Then Hading swam from under the upturned boat, where he had been hiding all the time, righted it, and rowed quietly away.

In time he came back, and overcame Toste

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

in single combat, for kings in olden days preferred to risk their own lives rather than those of their followers. And after this Hading still thought war a merrier life than peace.

The Treacherous Daughter

ADING'S wit was as quick as his arm was strong, yet near to him were dangers which he did not foreknow.

He dwelt in peace and feared no man, until a night when gentle Ragnhild, who had died during the war with Toste, came to him in a dream. She was pale, and her garments mingled with the moonlight, and she stretched out her arms above him, and spoke in a faint sweet voice.

“You have cherished a dangerous bird,

Beware!

Her song is as sweet as a swan's,

Beware!

Her heart is as black as an owl's,

Beware!”

[20]

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

When she had said "Beware" for the third time, she faded from his sight, and Hading rose up in the morning much perturbed, and took the dream to the soothsayers. After they had consulted the entrails of a bird, and after they had scanned the clouds, they said,

"Your dream can mean only one thing. Your daughter Uluilde must be plotting against your life."

Hading was sad at this, and put the thought from his mind, until he had cause to remember it.

At that very time, Uluilde the Headstrong was sitting with her husband Guthorm, and thus making moan: "Alas! My father was a king, and my mother a queen, yet my husband is only a churl."

Guthorm made no answer, but went on with the bit of harness he was fashioning, for he was an humble and a simple man. Uluilde moved a little nearer to him.

"My father has had his day. Tall trees

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

fall first in the water. A dozen men are waiting to seize the crown at his death."

Guthorm sighed, for it was not the first time he had heard these words. Then Uluilde snatched the bit of harness from his hand.

"If you were worthy of me," she said, "you would grasp the power, to which I am entitled."

"Oh well, and well," said Guthorm, "whatever do you purpose I should do about it?"

Uluilde smiled, and came to him, and laid her soft cheek against his, and spoke puringly,

"Let us invite the old greybeard to dinner, and I will ply him merrily with wine and song. And when he starts to nod, and stick flowers in his hair, do you give him his death blow from behind."

Guthorm shook his head.

"But," said Uluilde, stroking his cheek, "then you shall be king, and this will be a

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

good deed, because it will get us a better position."

So the day for the feast was set, and Hading came. But he had not forgotten Ragnhild's warning, in his dream, and he brought with him many friends, who hid their swords under their cloaks. Uluilde wore her fairest robe, and sang to him and kissed him, and filled his horn with ale, time after time. Hading let half the ale spill out unseen, and gave her kiss for kiss, and then he made as if to fall asleep. All this time Guthorm stood, twisting the border of his cloak, behind the old man.

Uluilde looked about and saw all Hading's friends lying about the board, and she contrived to pass by Guthorm, and hiss "Sluggard!" in his ear, and Guthorm drew his sword.

Up sprang the fighters of the king, who had seemed asleep before, and set upon him. To left and right they hacked, their swords

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

flashing ruddy in the firelight, until the mead which spilled from the broken horns ran red with blood on the floor, and the traitors themselves were made the victims of the feast.

Hading Dies for a Friend

ALL men, however wise, however brave, fulfill their weird at last, and Hading met his end, and the faithfulness of a friend was the cause of it.

To Hunding, King of Sweden, came false tidings of the death of Hading, his dear friend. Hunding lamented sorely, for Hading, whom he loved, and thought on ways to do him honor with the most costly burial feast that ever had been seen.

He gathered the stoutest men of Sweden, and bade them sit down about a table piled so thick with food that no man there could see the wood of it. Whole oxen and stags hissed on the spits before the roaring fire, and there was nothing lacking to good cheer.

[25]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Then Hunding caused to be brought in a vat of beer, so huge that seven men might stand together in it, and there he filled the drinking horns, with his own kingly hands.

It was the merriest funeral feast in all the world, and the singing grew louder and louder and the warriors beat on the table with their fists, and Hunding danced faster and faster round the vat, dipping into it here and there. Suddenly his foot slipped, he fell in, and was drowned.

Then over hill and dale sped messengers to Denmark, bearing to Hading the tidings that his friend had died in doing him honor. Hading sat on his throne, and heard them out in silence. Then he summoned all his warriors. In tones of measured sweetness he sang them a long song in praise of Hunding, who had died for his sake, and at the end, he said,

“Now that my friend’s life is done,
I wish no more to see the sun.”

[26]

THE FIVE ADVENTURES OF HADING

So saying, in the presence of them all, he strangled himself, and as he died he smiled, for he would not have any man think that he greeted death with a sorrowful countenance.

THE WARRIOR PRINCESS



THE WARRIOR PRINCESS

HERE was talk of carrying war throughout the East, even unto the Russians in their own town of Rotel. Frode, son of Hading, and his men, were making ready for this far campaign, when Swanwhite came up to them, wearing a helmet on her shining hair, and swinging a sword in her hand.

Now Swanwhite was the bravest and the fairest of Hading's daughters. When as a tiny maid she should have joined her sisters in the bower, embroidering with threads of many hues, she had been wont to trot about behind her father, learning to cast a spear, or wield a sword.

[31]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

"Where are you going, sister?" asked Frode.

"With you, to fight the Russians," answered Swanwhite.

"That you are not," said Frode, "for the lot of women is to be meek and peaceful, and to bide at home." With that he rode away, and left her standing there.

Swanwhite watched the warriors swing out of sight. Then she tore off her shining helm, and threw it on the ground, and flung her weapon after it. But when she heard her sisters, calling for her from the maiden's bower, Swanwhite picked up the helmet, and the sword, and did them on, and strode off to the woods.

Tall was Swanwhite, and she moved with a springing step, but small and fair were her hands and her head. All that day she chased the flying wild things, as fleet of foot as they, and all next day, and the next. The hall was quiet now the fighting men were gone, and the quiet was a weariness to Swanwhite.

THE WARRIOR PRINCESS

One day she found an old man in the woods, and fell into talk with him, and found he was a bard, who knew strange tales of distant lands.

"Come to the hall with me," said Swan-white, and would not let him say her nay, but brought him in and gave him food and drink, and bade him sing to her.

Thus sang the wandering bard:

"Hunding is dead in Sweden,
Hunding, your father's friend.
Now rules his queen, dark Thorhild,
Thorhild, whom trolls attend.

"Hunding's two sons are driven
Forth from their father's hall.
Thorhild, the witch stepmother
Holds them in magic thrall.

"Out in the distant meadow
They guard her lowly herd,
Regner the brave, and his brother,
Held by the mystic word."

[33]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

As Swanwhite heard this song her eyes began to sparkle, and she could scarce wait for the bard to have done. When he was silent, she sprang up and clapped her hands together, and gave a shout that brought her sisters running in.

"Get me my helm," cried Swanwhite, "fetch me my shining shield. I am off to Sweden to set two princes free."

With a clamor as of twittering birds her sisters tried to turn her from so rash a step.

"There will be dangers on the way," said one.

"Fear Frode's wrath!" cried another.

"It is not seemly for a princess to ride alone," said a third.

"I scorn danger," answered Swanwhite, with a toss of her small proud head. "Frode is not my father but my brother, and long ago he pledged me that I might wed whom I liked. Now it is in my mind to wed with Regner, the elder of these princes, and one of you may have Thorwald the younger, for

THE WARRIOR PRINCESS

not only shall I go, but you shall come with me, as my retinue."

When the princesses heard this, they trembled, but they dared not withstand her, and there was none to say her nay, for Frode and all his brave men were in Russia. So the maidens got them ready to ride forth, and Swanwhite bade her thralls ferry them over the narrow blue water to Sweden.

In Sweden the smiling meadows, edged by woods of fragrant pine, were green and sweet. The princesses rode along gaily enough, mounted on fine horses, their many colored veils floating behind them in the wind, and ahead of them went Swanwhite, sitting straight and proud, with her armour shining through a thin blue cloak.

All that day they rode, now chattering, now fearful, after Swanwhite, and she spoke them no word, nor looked at them, but her eyes danced beneath her helm.

When even came, their way led through the woods, and now the paths grew black and

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

narrow, and at every turn dark things of shadow met them, and made as if to spring upon them. Mute with fear, the princesses huddled together, and would have dismounted and fled on foot, but Swanwhite stayed them.

"The back of the tall horse is safer," she said. "Follow me."

At last there was a clearing, and in the clearing Regner and Thorwald, in humble dress, tended a herd of goats. All about the fallen princes ringed creatures of witchcraft, whom they could not see, for magic had blinded their eyes. Gibbering trolls tumbled around, witches danced in a circle, dragons hissed, and rattled their horny scales. While the maidens stared from their horses, frozen with terror, the wind blew a cloud of dreary ghosts past them, howling to the stars. The sisters trembled, but Swanwhite sat straight and proud, taking no heed.

Then Regner looked up from his ghosts, and saw only the princesses, with the moon-

THE WARRIOR PRINCESS

light glittering on their golden crowns.

"Who are you?" asked Swanwhite, though she knew the answer very well.

In shame for his rough garb, before so fine a company of ladies, Regner answered,

"We are but goatherds for a nearby thane. Today we lost our flock. It was night before we found them, and we dared not take them home so late, lest our master should beat us."

Now while he spoke Swanwhite was looking on his comely limbs, and marking the kingly flash of his eye, more than his words, and when he had done, she said, harmoniously,

"So proud a face
Means Kingly race.
Beware, for here
Are things of fear.
Turn, Prince, and fly,
Lest you should die."

Thus Swanwhite tested him, opening his eyes to the dire monsters about him, but

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

still all Regner's thought was shame to look so ill before so fine a lady, and he clung to his shamming, saying,

"Even a slave may hide a stout heart under his rags. Why should a man fear windy ghosts? Do not try to make a woman out of me, with your talk of flight, for I stand my ground."

Then Swanwhite was astonished and entranced at Regner's courage, and riding out of the dark and misty shadows which veiled her, she let him behold the full beauty of her face, and round white limbs, under the pale moon.

Regner forgot the trolls who threatened him, forgot his rags, forgot his humble state. Long he stood silent, dazzled by her, and when he drew breath again, he then and there pledged her his troth. After a moment, Swanwhite drew from under her long blue robe a cold gleaming sword of magic power, which she had thought to bring, and gave it to Regner, with these words,

THE WARRIOR PRINCESS

"My first gift to thee is a sword, on whose steel I plight my troth. It will avail thee if thou wilt remember that sword takes its strength from hand, and hand from heart. Strengthen thy heart then, and may glory reward thee."

Singing thus in praise of courage, she bade her sisters go, and they galloped gladly away from the haunted spot like a flock of startled lambs, taking Thorwald with them, but Swanwhite stayed with Regner, to fight the monsters.

There they stood, just they two, small proud Swanwhite, shining on her high white horse, and dusty Regner, with a cold gleaming sword, and all around them and about were shadows, silvered by the moon, and dark shapes with fiery eyes. And the dark Thorhild, in her distant palace, knew that they were there.

For a time was silence.

Then a savage wolf with dripping jaws ran from the moving horde, and met Reg-

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

ner's sword in his yawning gullet. When Swanwhite saw this she made haste to get her from her horse, and drew her weapon and stood fast by Regner's side. And dark Thorhild in her distant palace, sat pondering with knitted brows. Next came two giants, armed with bristling clubs, and one Swanwhite slew, and one fell by Regner's magic sword.

In the distant palace Thorhild rose up, and did bedight herself with diverse shapes.

Fast grew the battle, and furious the onslaughts. Hideous heads, and gaping jaws, hooklike hands, and tearing claws came through the writhing mist that circled about Swanwhite and Regner. All the short summer night they fought together, now back to back, and now side by side, and monsters too dire to mention died by the magic sword. Regner was weary, and would have fallen, but that Swanwhite gave him heart.

At last the moonlight yielded to the faint white dawn, and the crawling mist cleared

THE WARRIOR PRINCESS

from about them, and they saw to left and right, naught but the bodies of enchanted horrors. One Thing remained, and It was frightful to behold, for with each passing moment It changed Its aspect, growing ever more terrible.

First It was a bear, then a dragon, then a giant with hairy claws, then a troll with no face, only one flaming eye. Swanwhite and Regner faced It bravely.

"How shall we meet this Thing?" asked Regner.

"Trust your good sword, and trust your stout heart," answered Swanwhite, and she slashed at It, lopping off an arm.

Where the arm fell off seven more sprang out, but Regner, made bolder by her blow, took the magic sword, and thrust It through. There on the earth before them lay dark Thorhild, dead, with the magic sword through her heart, and her queenly crown hanging in her blood drenched hair.

Swanwhite and Regner rested a space,

[41]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

then went into the forest, and drew logs therefrom, and made a pyre, and placed on it all the bodies of the monsters, and burnt them, so that none might be poisoned by the touch of envenomed blood.

When the black smoke rolled up to darken the high heaven, Swanwhite and Regner mounted her tall white horse, and rode away to claim the throne of Sweden.

That day Regner was hailed as king, and in that state he meant to do much fighting and win fame. Thus he thought it very irksome to begin with a wedding, but at last he bethought him that Swanwhite had saved his life, and won his throne, so he kept troth with her, and made her his wife.

Frode came back from his war in the East, and waxed wroth at the doings of his sister, but in the end Swanwhite made peace with him, and Regner became his ally and helped him against the Frisians and the Scots, and even the Britons, in their city of London.

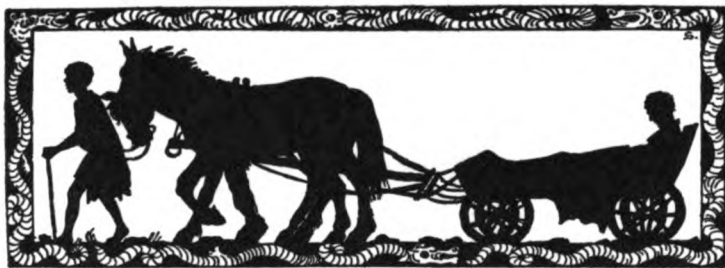
[42]

THE WARRIOR PRINCESS

Regner and Swanwhite lived with joy together until Regner met his end. Then Swanwhite also pined and died, for she had loved him so in life, that she was fain to follow him soon out of it.

THE DEATH OF BALDER
THE BEAUTIFUL






THE DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL

I

The Sword of Strength

WANWHITE and Regner had a son, and he a son in turn, named Hother, who was early left an orphan, and reared by Gewar, King of Norway. In swimming and riding, boxing and wrestling, shooting with the bow, and casting the spear, none equalled Hother, and no one sang so sweet as he to harp or hackebret.

One long blue summer morning, he sat, as was his wont, under a certain tree, singing,

[47]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

and making joy or sorrow with his song, and on the grass beside lay little Nanna, Gewar's daughter, for Gewar smiled upon their love.

"I am weary of singing," said Hother, and laid aside his harp, "I shall go and hunt."

Nanna, her blue eyes filled with love, went after him, till he outstripped her, and left her by a hidden rivulet. When he was gone, she doffed her robe upon the moss, and slipped into the stream to bathe. She stood there, round and swaying, like a slim white birch, with clear drops running from her fingertips, and so it was that her bright beauty brought them sorrow, for Balder, son of the All-father Odin, came upon her, though she wist not of it, and was stricken with love and longing at the sight.

All this while, Hother strode along, deeper and deeper into the forest, and little by little, ere he was ware, the sun was blotted from his sight by a thick white mist. Thicker and thicker grew the mist, until he lost his way, and strayed hither and yon.

DEATH OF *BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL*

Suddenly he found himself in a clearing before a small brown saeter, and the mist was gone.

"Hail, Hother!" called a voice.

"Who knows me here?" cried Hother, and beheld three woodmaidens, whose color was green as a leaf, coming toward him from the saeter.

"We are your guardians," answered the woodmaidens, "when you go out to battle we stand by your side, and guide the spear to its mark in the flesh of the enemy. Now danger threatens you, for Balder, son of the Gods, has looked upon Nanna with love in his heart."

When Hother heard this his bosom swelled with rage, and he said,

"Let Balder fight me for her."

"Nay," said the woodmaidens, "for mortal man may not prevail against the gods."

With these words, they vanished into the dappled trees, and Hother found himself alone in an open field, with the blue sky

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

above him, and the green grass about his feet.

Then he made haste to Gewar, and besought the hand of Nanna.

"Alas!" said Gewar, "I would gladly give my daughter to my foster son, had not Balder asked for her. Now I fear that I should fall under the wrath of Odin if I refused him."

"Let Balder fight me for her," said Hother, dark with rage.

"Only one steel can pierce his sacred body," answered Gewar, "and that is the sword of the troll, Miming."

"How shall I come to Miming?" asked Hother.

"Cold is the way to Miming, hidden and perilous, and it lies over icy mountains, and over frozen seas. But if you, my son, go thither, harness a sled with reindeer, who can draw you swiftly over the snow ere the cold drive in to your marrow. When you reach the cave where Miming hides the Strength-giving Sword and the Wealth-giv-

[50]

DEATH OF *BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL*

ing Bracelet set up your tent so that the cave lies between you and the sun. For if Miming should see your shadow, he would take warning, and remain within."

Hother made haste to do as Gewar said.

Northward for many days he travelled, behind his swift gray reindeer, until he reached the place of everlasting snow, and aching cold. There he found the cave, and pitched his tent in its black shadow. His days he spent in hunting for his food, his nights in watching, until by one moon, he beheld the shadow of the woodtroll on his tent.

Then Hother sprang up, and casting a swift spear brought Miming down, and bound him hand and foot. Miming lay writhing on the ground, rolling his bald head to and fro, and showing his toothless gums.

"Give me your Bracelet and your Sword, or die!" said Hother, standing over him.

Now life is more than wealth, so Miming nodded, and when Hother freed him, scuttled to his cave and brought them forth.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

"May they bring you sorrow," said Miming, but Hother went gleefully away, for these trophies, though few, were kingly.

This feat brought Hother glory, yet, ere he could test his prize, and claim the hand of Nanna, it brought him grief.

The King of Saxony heard of the Bracelet and the Sword, and gathered a fleet to come and win them.

Gewar foreknew this, since he had skill in reading omens, and calling Hother to him spoke wisely.

"When they come against you in their tall ships, do not rush to meet them, but let your men make a stout wall of shields joined edge to edge, and take the onslaught till they have spent their weapons. Then attack."

Battle was joined out on the summer sea, and Hother was mindful of the words of Gewar.

His men stood fast along the ship, behind a wall of shields. The spears of the foe hissed through the air, struck harmless, and

DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL

bounced into the sea, or stuck and quivered in the wood. Then the men wrenched them out, and cast them back at the Saxons. When the greedy Saxon king saw that his foe was hurling back upon him his own spears, he hoisted a crimson shield to the top of his mast, in token of surrender, and Hother's men shouted in triumph.

Hother was kind to him, and hoped to send him away a friend rather than a foe, but without the Bracelet and the Sword, and these the Saxon king could not forget.

"And now," thought Hother, "I may try my sword on Balder, for whom I won it, slay him, and wed with Nanna," and he sailed back to land.

But there he met, instead of Balder, Helgi the Stammerer, King of Heligoland, his friend, sad and downcast.

"What ails you?" said Hother.

"Only you can help me," answered Helgi. "The K-King of F-Finland has a daughter Th-Thora, whom I love. B-But as my speech

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

is not like that of other men, I dare not g-go myself to ask her hand for fear of being laughed at. I s-sent two s-spokesmen who came back with only scornful words from her rough father. N-now you can sing so that the birds are charmed. Will you not g-go, and make my plea for me?"

"Alas," said Hother, "that you should ask this now, for I had other work afoot. Yet I will not refuse you."

Then he sought Nanna, in the maiden's bower, and bade her farewell, in melodious song.

"Heavy of heart at parting,
I must again be starting,
Guard thyself well.
Here where I wooed thee, singing,
Back would my thoughts be winging
If aught befell."

Thus sang Hother, and went with a sad countenance over the sea, on his mission of friendship.

DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL

Scarcely had he gone, when Balder, clad in shining armour, came, with a band of fighters, to press his suit for Nanna. Gewar dared not refuse him, but only asked that the maiden should not be forced to wed against her will.

In this time Nanna was as little at the hall as might be, for she shunned Balder, lest she should have to wed him, and spent her days in that green glade where she and Hother had played and sung together, and told each other of their love.

There Balder came to her, with sunshine playing on his armour, and an unearthly light shining from his white crested helm, and with sweet and winning words he asked her to be his bride. Nanna turned on him the startled eyes of a doe who has been trapped by a hunter, but she summoned her wits to her aid, and made him answer,

“Great Balder, how should I, who am only a maid of Earth, dare to wed with a God?”

Then Balder set himself to prove to her

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

that it was meet, and Nanna asked three days to weigh the matter. At the end of three days, when Balder came to her again, this time in the hall, she said,

“The Gods often break their word to men, for pledges between unequals are not binding. How then dare I trust myself to one of them?”

Again Balder set himself to reason with her, and again she wished a respite of three days.

A third time on the appointed day Nanna cast down her eyes, and said,

“Balder, beside Thee I am but a star that pales before the sun. When mine eyes cannot even bear to look upon Thy radiance, how might I dare to wed Thee?”

While she spoke thus, she thought in her heart, “Thy golden curls shine gloriously about Thy head, O Balder, yet are they not so fair as those of Hother.”

Once more Balder granted her time for thought, and so from day to day with many

DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL

a shuffling answer, she put him off until at last Hother returned successful from his quest in Finland.

When he arrived Gewar took him aside and told him that Balder waxed impatient, and that Nanna could dally no longer. When Hother heard this he went straight to Helgi, for trouble is ever lighter if one may share it with a friend. And after they had talked they saw that Hother must give war to Balder, rash though such a step might be.

The challenge went forth, and the day was set, and Balder came, with all the holy company of the gods, against Hother and his men.

Odin, the one-eyed Father, the greatest of them all was there, and Thor the Thunderer, swinging his terrible club. Naught could stand before the blows of mighty Thor. His club crushed shield and helm, and sword and breastplate. The battle would have gone hard with the children of men had not Hother, armed with the Sword of Strength,

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

charged through the gods, and with one strong swift blow severed Thor's dread weapon at the haft.

When the gods lost this defense, they fled from the field, and Hother was left victorious.

But for the truth in old tales, this triumph of the children of men over the gods would not be believed, for common thought is that it could not be. Nevertheless, remember that these were not true gods, only folk called them so.

Balder saved his life by flight, and Hother and his men fell on the deserted ships of the gods, and with curved scythes hacked them to bits, wreaking their anger on the senseless wood. As Hother hacked he shouted, "Thus may it be with all who would part me from Nanna!" And to this day the harbor, Baldersund, bears in its name a witness to the fight.

Among those who were bound with Balder in this war was the King of Saxony, still

DEATH OF *BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL*

hoping for the Bracelet and the Sword. Instead of this he lost his life, and that of all his men.


Then Hother took the ships and dragged them up on the shore, and made a pyre of them. Upon the pyre he heaped the bodies of the oarsmen, and of the fighters who had fallen in the battle, and on the top, as it towered to the sky, he placed the body of the Saxon king, and burnt it.

Such was the magnificent funeral of the King of Saxony.

Hother returned to the hall, and made haste to marry Nanna, before there was further let or hindrance.

And now in every land Hother was sung and held in honor since he had put the gods to flight, and Balder was laughed at, for having fled before a mortal. But Balder bided his time.

The Immortal Food

OTHER was wed to Nanna, but Balder brooded over her.

One day, when Hother and Nanna were singing beneath their tree, they heard the people shouting,

“Balder is coming! Balder is coming!”

They ran to the edge of the hill, and looked down, and beheld on the fjord, Balder and his men, in war array.

“Do not be frightened, Nanna,” said Hother, “for I shall soon put him to flight again,” and with that he made ready, only to learn that luck is like glass, when it shines fairest, then it breaks soonest. Balder put such a sore defeat upon him that he and Nanna fled in the night, and sought shelter with Gewar.

[60]

DEATH OF *BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL*

Exultant Balder smote upon the earth, and there gushed forth a spring, where his men might slake their thirst, and it flows there to this day. But victory brought no gladness to Balder, for he was haunted by dreams of Nanna, until his strength was departed from him, and he had to be carried on his journeys, drawn by two horses, and lying in a four wheel cart.

Meanwhile Hother heard that Denmark lacked a leader, and he said to Nanna,

"This cheers me, for I shall take Denmark. And indeed it should be mine, for am I not sprung from kingly Hading?"

And Nanna wondered at his bravery. So he took a fleet, and sailed to Isefjord, on the Danish coast, and thence to the Danes, saying,

"Hother, who put the gods to flight, is here, and means to be your king."

The Danes took only a brief counsel together, and then made haste to ask him to the throne.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Hother ruled merrily in Denmark for a time, and then he heard that Athisl his brother, who was king in Sweden, had died from drinking deeply at a funeral, bringing his own death when he thought himself to be merely honouring that of another.

At this Hother said to Nanna,

“Make ready, for I go to Sweden to take the kingdom, and bid the people pay a yearly tribute to the Danish crown.”

All this befell as Hother meant, but while he was away, Balder, still in search of Nanna, came to Denmark with a fleet.

The Danes gazed in amazement on his majestic presence, his glimmering armour, and his white crested helm, and they began to talk among themselves, saying,

“This man is surely greater than Hother. Fire flashes from his eyes, and light plays about his golden curls. It would be better to make him king over us in Hother’s stead, lest he might fall upon and slay us.”

Hother hastened back from Sweden when

DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL

he heard that the shifty Danes had made Balder king, but a second time Balder overcame him, and drove him to hide in rocky Jutland during the winter.

With the spring, sad and alone, Hother went back to Sweden, where he had left Nanna, and called her to him, and all his men, and made a song.

“Dark is my life, twice overcome by shining
Balder.

A mortal cannot win against the gods.
Therefore, farewell, I go from you forever,
To end my days in some bleak wilderness.”

Thus singing, Hother wandered forth alone, taking only the Bracelet of Wealth on his arm, and girding the Sword of Strength by his side, and went through the waste lands, until he reached a place where no men came.

Behind him in Sweden, his folk came often to the hill whence he had wont to give forth rede, and called upon him and made lament for his passing, but far away in the

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Lost Lands, Hother went alone, feeding on wild animals, and on the small blue berries which grew amid the rocks.

One day he laid him down and slept on the peak of a high mountain, and all about him were mountains and far-stretching land, and all the land was waste. When he awoke, twilight had come, and he was sore bewildered, for he found himself in a glade, before the saeter of the woodmaidens, who had befriended him before.

Hother sprang up, and went into the saeter, and found them weaving garlands, but as he was not in a good mood toward them, he reproached them bitterly.

"Have you come to taunt me, false woodmaidens? Trusting in you, I went against the gods and lost, and now you find me where I hide myself, and mock at my grief."

"Nay, Hother," answered the woodmaidens, softly, "do you not know that but for us, your body would have fed the ravens, long ere now? Harken to words of cheer.

[64]

DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL

The strength of Balder comes from a food which gives the gods their immortality. Three maidens, ever young and ever fair, prepare it daily for his use. If you could eat of it, then you might overcome him."

At this Hother found himself alone on the bare mountain peak.

But now his soul was stirred, and he hastened from the Lost Lands to his kingdom, helped no little on the journey by the wood-maidens. He climbed up to the hill of rede, and shouted in a loud voice, and the folk ran out from every side to see who had gone up on the hill of their king, and when they beheld Hother they were filled with delight.

"Make ready for war on Balder!" shouted Hother. "Speak not of fear, for courage must be deaf to reason. Small pebbles can after all upset swift carts."

So he mustered his men, and went against Balder, and the Danes who had played him false, and Balder also got him gladly to the field, for he thought now surely he might

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

have done with Hother, and take Nanna for himself.

All the first day they fought, and neither side was uppermost, and by night they all were glad enough to rest.

All of the men were sleeping under the dark sky, when Hother stole forth alone. Silently he stepped among them, and no one stirred, and silently he came to Balder's tent. There all was still, but in the grass before the door, Hother saw footsteps, in the dew.

The footsteps led away to the wood, and Hother followed them, and saw ahead of him three white shadows in the dusk, who trod a hidden path, and disappeared into a house. Hother went to the house, and knocked, and a maiden coming to the door, screamed when she saw him.

"Have no fear," said Hother, "for I am but a harpist. Let me in, and I will sing you songs which cannot be forgotten. Thus we may while away the time, until tomorrow's fighting, for I am one of Hother's men."

[66]

DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL

At that the maiden opened the door, and Hother saw two others, in a fair room, decked with boughs.

"Give him a harp, to test his words," said the eldest of the maidens, and Hother took the harp, and sang so sweetly that, forgetting fright, they went about their tasks again.

First Hother sang of the white foaming sea, of racing ships, and deeds of daring, and the eldest of the maidens brought forth a runewrought box, and opened it. Then each of them put in her hand, and took therefrom a writhing snake, and hung it to the rafter by the tail.

Then Hother sang of the joy of fighting, how the swords hiss their way to the flesh of the foe, and the second of the maidens brought food on a golden dish, and placed it below the open mouths of the snakes, so that the poison from their fangs should drip upon it.

Last Hother sang of love, of the green bower that saw his wooing, of the soft limbs

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

of maidens, and the strength of men, and the maidens took away the food, and put the snakes back in the runewrought box, then sat and listened to his song.

When he had done no one spoke for a time. Then the maidens broke forth in praise, and the youngest would have him taste the holy food, as guerdon for his song.

"Nay sister," said the eldest, "for though this man sings like the gods, he is Balder's foe, and we may not betray our Lord by giving his food to one who fights against him. Yet I have somewhat that may be of use."

Then she put her hand in the runewrought box, and saying a Word, brought forth a golden girdle, cunningly fashioned like the skin of a serpent, which she gave to Hother, saying,

"This belt has been in no way pledged to Balder, yet it can give to him who wears it, more than mortal strength."

Hother thanked them, hiding his delight, and did the belt on, and left the house. The

DEATH OF BALDER THE BEAUTIFUL

faint wind of dawn stirred the beeches, as he went back along the path, and then he heard the sound of someone coming, and shrank into the shadow to see what it might be.

Balder, his helm gleaming like water in the gray light, had felt a danger, and was on his way to guard the holy food.

Strong in the magic belt, Hother drew his Sword of Strength, and plunged it into Balder's side, and the god fell to the earth, with a shout. Then Hother fled through the woods, ere Balder's men should come upon him.

When he reached his men, and told them what had befallen they shouted for joy, and from the Danish side came sounds of public mourning.

Before the day was high, Balder saw Hela, goddess of the underworld, and knew that he must die. Yet he had himself borne into the fray, lying in a litter, so that he might guide the fighting while his strength lasted, but all his bravery did not avail him, and he died.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

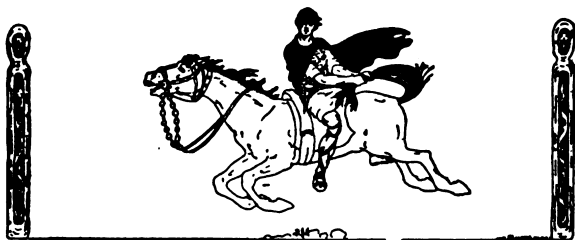
He was buried in a barrow on the spot, and for all time his tomb was safe, for if a robber came to it a flood of water gushed forth from the ground.

Hother took back his throne of Denmark, and reigned there with Nanna, many years.

But the gods work their will.

Odin the All-father plotted vengeance, and begot another son, who in the end slew Hother, and was slain of him.

**AMLETH, PRINCE OF
DENMARK**



AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

IN the hall of Denmark's king a fire
burnt low, and Amleth, heir to the
throne, sat in the embers, smeared
with ash, and brooding eyed, fashioning bits
of wood into the shape of hooks.

Wild was his mien, and the jarls stood
about and pointed at him, whispering among
themselves. But he gave them only one
answer,

“I sharpen a spear to avenge my father's
death.”

Up in the hall sat the usurper, Fenge, and
he gazed at his nephew Amleth through eyes
burning with hatred. Black was Fenge, and

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

black was his heart, for he had slain the king, his brother, and wed the queen whom he had widowed, Gerutha, Amleth's mother, daughter of Hother's son.

Cloaking his sin he said that this was done only to save Gerutha from a wicked husband, and his lie was believed, as are the lies of kings even today, where slanderers and tale-bearers are held in honor. So Fenge ruled unpunished for his twofold sin, (those who sin once sin more bravely the second time), and Amleth feigned madness for his life.

Betimes he lay in the mud about the door, betimes he sat as now, sweeping the coals with wooden hooks, and ever he felt the burning eyes of Fenge on him, and ever he cried one cry, like the wail of a ghost,

"I sharpen a spear to avenge my father's death."

Gerutha heard him, and the color left her cheeks. Fenge heard him, and frowned and called a sly friend to his side.

"Mescemeth," said Fenge, "yon lad is not

AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

so mad as he feigneth to be, and I would have you find a way to test him."

The sly friend thought, then answered, "Any man alone with a fair girl will utter words of love to her. Let us then find a maid and leave Amleth with her in a lonely spot to spy upon him, and see what he does."

"So be it," said Fenge, and he called his men, and bade them make ready the testing. But one among them had been reared as fosterbrother to Amleth in his childhood, and when he heard the plan he fastened a straw to the tail of a gadfly, and let it skim past Amleth where he sat. Amleth saw it, and knew that something strange was under way, and though he made no sign, he watched.

Soon Fenge came to Amleth, with an oily smile, and spoke him fair. "Rise up, my son," he said, "for I have brought a horse for you and would have you ride it."

Amleth rose from his place in the ashes, and hung the hooks which he had been making at his belt, and walked out, laughing

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

wildly, to the door. There stood a noble steed, and Amleth vaulted on it backward, and seizing the tail in both hands as if to steer the horse by it, galloped off to the woods. All the jarls rushed after.

In time they came to the appointed spot, and there they found a woman, passing fair. When Amleth saw her, he vaulted from his horse, and running to her side, he danced about her, plucking at her robe.

Soon he could mark that all had left them, and that they seemed to be alone in that dim spot. But Amleth remembered the gadfly with the straw on its tail, so took her hand, and capered with her to a cave, where he knew none might espy them. There he dropped his shamming, and besought her with all sweetness to be his friend and keep his secret, and the woman promised, and she kept her word.

The next day Fenge, black hearted Fenge, balked of his prey, summoned his friend again.

[76]

AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

"Your plot has failed," he said, "and you must think of a better one. For that young man is evil to my sight, yet I dare not slay him while the folk think him mad, lest they should turn upon me."

"Very well," answered the other, "do you go away for a day's journey, and leave Amleth alone with his mother. If he have any wits at all, he will then open his heart to the queen, and I myself will hide in the room, and tell you all that passes."

When morning came, Fenge made ready, as if for a long journey, and after he had gone, Gerutha called Amleth to her room.

Amleth came in, with his silly hooks at his belt, and one half finished in his hand. When he saw his mother by herself, he began to clap his hands together, flapping his arms to and fro, running about the room, and crowing like a cock. In a corner lay a bundle of straw, and Amleth jumped upon it.

"Cockadoodle do!" crowed Amleth, and he felt something hard beneath his feet.

[77]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Again he crowed, and crowing took his sword, and ran it through the something hard, three times. Then he tore apart the bundle, dragged out the spy, half dead, killed him, and cutting his body in pieces, threw it to the pigs. This done he came quietly back to his mother.

Gerutha was sitting where he had left her, wringing her hands together in terror and grief, while the hot tears ran down her bloodless cheeks, and Amleth said,

“Weep not for my madness, mother. Weep rather for your own disgrace. Weep for your wedding with your husband’s murderer, or hold your peace. As for me, know that the longing to avenge my father lies like a load on my heart, day and night.”

When Gerutha heard these words, and looked into the stern face of her son, she repented somewhat of her sin, and told Amleth that she would hide his secret, and even help him if she might.

[78]



*In the embers sat Amleth, brooding eyed, fashioning
bits of wood into the shape of hooks.*

AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

Fenge came back at the close of the day, and sought for his friend, but none had seen him.

"Your friend," said Amleth, "went to feed the pigs, fell in the sty, and was eaten by them." Loud and long laughed Fenge and his men at this silly answer, which as a matter of fact was true. Loud and long had they also laughed at Amleth's hooks of wood, which he made in the fire, yet the time came when they rued that laughter.

Twice now Fenge's trap had failed, and daily waxed his longing to see Amleth dead, but fear of Gerutha's anger stayed him. At last he thought to send the prince to the king of England, with a secret message saying that he should be put to death. In this way the blame for the killing would not fall on himself, and he did not care at all for his friend's good name, so long as he did not hurt his own.

When Amleth heard that he was to be

[79]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

sent on a journey he first hid his hooks where no man might find them, and then went and spoke to his mother, alone.

"In a year and a day," he said, "do you tell Fenge I am dead. Then deck the hall with knots of woven cloth, as if for mourning, and hold my burial feast. On that day I swear by the unavenged blood of my father, and by my stolen realm, I will come back to you."

On the next morning Amleth left, skipping as was his wont when men beheld him, between two of Fenge's henchmen, Grim and Stiff. Now the henchmen bore letters, whose meaning they did not know, for they could neither read nor write, and the letters asked the King of England, in the name of his friendship with Fenge, to have Amleth put to death.

The way to England was long and hard, and it lay through woods and over meadows, and across the sea. In part they went by ship, but for the most they walked, and nightfall

AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

found them footsore and weary enough. One night they spent in a great forest, and there they built a little fire, for the evening was chill, and after laid them down and slept about the blaze. When Amleth saw that the others were sleeping like men who had walked far, and earned rest, he sat up quietly, and took the pack they bore, which they had never let him carry, and opened it. In it he found the letter, written on wooden blocks, as was the custom in those days.

Amleth read the letter by the light of the dying fire, and glanced at his companions. They still slept, so Amleth took a spear head, and heating it, burnt out his name on the wooden blocks, and wrote the names of the two henchmen in its place. Then he put back the letters in the pack, and laid him down to peaceful dreaming, well content.

At length the days and nights of journeying were past, and they came to the palace of the King of England. All unwitting of what was to befall, the two henchmen gave

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

the letter to the king, who read it and made no sign. The palace was a fine palace, and the King bade them be welcome, and made haste to feast them. The henchmen ate and drank their fill, and were refreshed, but Amleth, frowning, said no word, and scorned all that was set before him.

The King of England wondered when he saw all his dishes treated as if they had been lowly fare, and he called a trusted follower to his side.

"Go to their room, before they go to bed," he bade him, "hide behind the hangings, hear what they say, and tell me all tomorrow."

The follower did as he was told, and Amleth and his fellow journeyers did not know that he was there. When they thought themselves alone, the henchmen asked Amleth,

"Why did you shun the good king's food?"

"The bread tasted of blood, and the meat of dead men," answered Amleth.

"But why did you drink no beer?"

"The beer tasted of iron," said Amleth.

AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

"But why at least did you say nothing to the king and queen?"

"The king," quoth Amleth, "had eyes like a serf, and the queen behaved in three ways like a serving woman."

With these words he laid him down and slept, and his companions talked together for a time, saying, "Of a truth he must be mad, so to speak of the good master the king, and to insult the queen."

On the morrow, he who had been behind the hangings told these sayings to the King of England, and the king was sore bewildered.

"This man is a fool or he is wise," he said, "and I shall find out which it be. He thought my eyes were like a serf's? Fetch me my mother."

When the old queen was brought and questioned, she grew very pale, and swore that she knew no man save the late king, but when they threatened her, she owned that her son's father was indeed her thrall. Then

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

the king saw that Amleth had been right in one thing, and might be right in all, and he sent for him.

Amleth came quietly into the hall, and stood in silence.

"Tell me," quoth the king, "why did you scorn my fare?"

"The bread smacked of blood, the meat of dead men, and the beer of iron," answered Amleth again.

Then the king sent to the baker and the butcher and the brewer, to find how this might be, and word came back that the grain from which the bread had been made was grown in a battlefield, that the hogs who had been killed for meat, had fed one day on the body of a robber, and that two rusted swords had been found in the spring from which the water for the ale was taken.

Then the king knew not what to say to Amleth, but at length he asked, "Young man of wondrous knowledge, why did you speak

AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

ill of the queen, when she behaved so well toward you?"

Amleth was ready for the question. "Because," said he, "she has three customs such as only common women use. She covered her head with a shawl, she pulled her dress up under her belt when she walked, and she ate what she picked from between her teeth after the meal was done."

When the queen heard this she blushed a rosy red, and would have wept, but Amleth turned to her, and said kindly,

"These things I say to help you. I know your mother was a serf. I do not wish that you should behave so from lack of knowledge."

After the king got over his bewilderment at Amleth's wisdom, he loaded the Danish prince with honors and gave him his daughter to wife. Also, on the morrow he put the two henchmen to death, as he was asked to do in Fenge's letter.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

At even of that day, Amleth came into the hall clad in rags, and besmirched with dirt, and the king made haste to ask him why he was so sorrowful.

"Alas," quoth Amleth, "my two friends are slain, and where in this strange land shall I turn for help? In truth I had but them, in all of England, and they are taken from me."

Then the king was very sorry, and tried to comfort Amleth by giving him a sum of gold, which Amleth melted and poured into two hollow staves. After this he abode with the princess his wife, and the King of England. But when nearly a year had passed he asked the king to let him go to his home, and of all his princely wealth he took with him only the two staves, filled with gold. On the uttermost edge of Denmark he laid aside his rich tunic, and his purple cloak, and clad himself in rags, and so came to Fenge's hall.

As he drew near it he heard the rafters ringing with laughter and song. It was a year and a day since he had left. Stopping a

AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

bondsman who came hurrying out, he asked him why there was such merriment.

"Today," answered the bondsman, "the queen had word of the mad prince's death. Now they are holding his burial feast, and all are happy and gay."

Then Ameth saw that his mother had kept her word, and he went silently into the hall. At first no one marked him out in the gay throng, but when they did behold him, the laughter stopped.

At the sight of the very man whose death they were honouring, they all felt as foolish as might be, and each man turned to his neighbor and blamed him for hanging the hall in mourning, and starting the feast. At length one gathered his wits enough to ask Amleth what had become of his two fellow wayfarers.

"They are here," answered Amleth, soberly, and pointed to his staves. Loud and long was the laughter at this, yet again Amleth had but spoken the truth, for the staves

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

were hollow, and filled with the blood money of the followers.

"Go on with your feast," said Amleth, brooding eyed, "and I myself will fill your horns, and see that you drink enough in my honor."

Then Amleth ran to and fro among them, as they lay about on the benches, and filled now this horn, and now that. Wishing, he said, to free his hands, he took off his sword belt, and girded it on over, instead of under, his cloak. After this he made greater haste to see that none were thirsty.

Amleth joined not in the singing and the jesting. He spake no word, took naught of food or drink, but now and again, as he went ever more swiftly on his task, he drew his sword from the scabbard, and sharpened the blade on the palm of his hand.

Black Fenge from his high seat saw Amleth doing this, and did not like the manner of his doing. Some of the guests marked it, as well, and one of them rose up. Taking a nail,

AMLETH, PRINCE OF DENMARK

he drove it through the sword and scabbard too, and made them fast so that the sword could not be drawn.

Amleth said nothing, but plied that man with ale.

At last Fenge was overcome with drink and his henchmen bore him to his room. Soon not one man was at the board, but all fell from their seats and lay about the floor in drunken sleep. Amleth alone was standing in the hall, and he looked down on them a space, silent and stern.

Then Amleth went to his hiding place, and brought forth his hooks, and bore them back to the hall. Silent still, and brooding eyed, he pulled down the black hangings from the walls and the carved posts, and overspread the sleeping guests, and made them fast with the hooks, so that none might rise from where he lay. After this Amleth went to the low burning fire, where in bygone time he had been wont to sit, and he drove the sparks into a pile of brush which lay nearby. It blazed

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

up, and the fire caught the carved posts, and soon went roaring up to the high rafters.

Amleth ran quickly into Fenge's room.

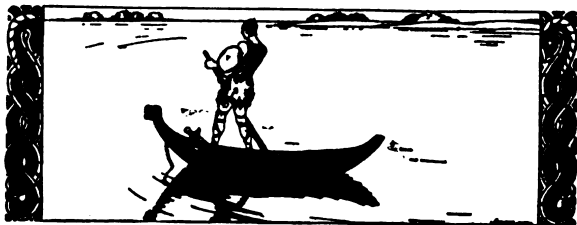
Fenge lay in his bed, lost in heavy sleep. He had taken thought to draw his sword, and lay it on the coverlet beside him. Amleth took the sword, and put his own in its stead. Then he cried in a loud voice,

"Fenge! Your hall and your men are burning! Amleth with his hooks is come to avenge his father!"

Fenge heard, and sprang to his feet, and tried to draw his sword, but it was nailed fast to the scabbard. Then Amleth smote him, and he died.

Thus Amleth earned everlasting praise, for he hid wisdom under a self-made cloak of folly, and with thought, and bravery, not only avenged his father, and won back his kingdom, but saved his own life.

UFFE THE SILENT



UFFE THE SILENT

WHEN their hall the Danes were met, and they were silent, with a grief too deep for words.

High on his dark carved throne, sat King Vermund, old and blind, with no son beside him to hold up his trembling hands, and black and bitter was the sorrow in his heart. A space was cleared on the earthen floor before him, and in it stood three spokesmen, from the King of Saxony.

One of them stepped forth, and said,

“Our lord sends word, O Vermund, that you have kinged it long enough over the land your father took from Amleth. You are old, and weak, and the years have stricken you

[93]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

with blindness. Therefore he bids you give him your crown."

Vermund's thin hands shook in his long white beard, and his sightless eyes were dry and hard, but at length he made answer,

"I have fought my fights. I have earned peace. Your king grows brave as I grow old. But I never turned my back on a foe, and I will fight him single handed rather than yield."

The Danes cheered, but the Saxon spokesmen laughed aloud, and said,

"Our king would turn red and white with shame to think of fighting a blind man. You both have sons. Let them meet and settle it."

The Danes looked at each other in dismay, and Vermund bowed his head, and no one spoke.

Vermund's son was Uffe, the long awaited child of his old age. Uffe was the tallest and the strongest of his fellows, but he had never held a sword, had never cast a spear, had never taken part in games, had never spoken.

UFFE THE SILENT

Vermund's heart was black with sorrow, for he thought his only child was dumb.

While the Danes were looking at each other in shame and bewilderment, a mighty voice rumbled forth from the end of the hall,

"O king, let me answer these boasting Germans."

The Danes turned quickly, and saw Uffe standing in the doorway.

"Who is that?" said Vermund, straining his sightless eyes toward the voice.

"Uffe!" shouted all his men together.

"Alas," cried Vermund, "it was not enough to be flouted by strangers. Now my own folk jeer at me."

"But it *was* Uffe!" said the Danes.

Vermund sighed, "Let him speak, whoever he may be."

Then Uffe shouldered his way through the crowd until he came to the Saxons, and said,

"Go home, babblers. Your lord reckoned without his host when he pointed his nose at a country whose king still rules it. Vermund

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

will be followed by his son. I will meet your prince, and any strong man whom he brings to help him."

The Saxons hooted, for they thought Uffe brave in words alone, and they set the time and place for the meeting, and hastened away to carry the tidings to their own land.

Behind them the hall rang with shouts of praise, and Vermund stood up from his throne, and called,

"Hail to the man who has routed the Saxons! He who is brave enough to challenge two at once, shall have my kingdom when I die. Better a strong man, whoever he may be, than a boastful foe."

"Vermund," shouted the Danes, "it was your son!"

"Let me feel of him," quavered Vermund, "for I cannot see him."

Uffe came and stood before the throne, while Vermund passed wrinkled hands over his face, and down his limbs and knew that it was his son. Then Vermund said,

[96]

UFFE THE SILENT

"My son, my only son, why did you never speak to me before?"

"Until today," answered Uffe, "my father could say all that was meet and fitting."

Forthwith Vermund fell to making plans.

"When you meet the Saxon prince," he said, "you must have trusty armour, and a good sword. I would that you had had more use in arms. But we must teach you what we can."

Then Vermund sent for all the breast-plates, and stout sarks of mail throughout the land, and Uffe tried them. Each time that he essayed to do them on, the rings and rivets burst over his chest. When he had tried and cast aside all that were brought him, Vermund sent for his own armour.

It creaked with rust, but though it was so huge that it took two men to carry it, Uffe could not get it on.

"Break it under the left arm, and fasten it with hooks. No one will see such a little opening under the shield," quoth Vermund,

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

feeling of the gap to see how great it was.

Then they must find a sword.

The smiths of the land came with their finest work, and laid the gleaming blades at Uffe's feet. One after another his great hand closed on their ringed hilts, one after another he swung them singing through the air, and one after another they shattered with the strength of the blow.

When Vermund heard the cracking and the splitting of the swords, he said,

"Now I know that only my Skrep will do. When I was stricken blind, I hid it in the ground for I thought my son could never wield it."

With this Vermund had himself led forth into a field hard by the hall.

"Show me the rock in the midst of the field," he said, and they took him there.

"Now show me the oak that is behind the rock."

When he came to the oak he bade his men dig deep about the roots, and there they

UFFE THE SILENT

unearthed Skrep, and brought it forth into the light. Skrep was covered with rust and dirt, and its edge was dented with many blows. Uffe looked at it, and said,

“Father, Skrep does not look fit for fighting. Let me test it, ere I bear it against the foe.”

“Nay, son,” answered Vermund, “for if Skrep will not do, then there is no sword in the four kingdoms that will. Nothing is gained by testing.”

Now the days passed swiftly enough, until it was time for the combat. The meeting was set on a small island in the middle of the river Ejder, which could only be reached by a boat, so that there might be no fear of treachery. There came the Saxons, and there came Vermund and his men, in brave array.

Before them went their trumpeters, blowing on their long curved lurer (horns), and then came the best men of the Danes, leaping and shouting. Vermund was borne along in their midst, lying in a carved litter, with his

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

red robe hanging out of it, and tall Uffe walked at his side, clad in armour hooked together under the left arm, holding rusty Skrep in his right hand.

When they came to the river, Uffe took a little boat, and went alone to the island. The Saxon prince saw him, and came from the other side, with the strongest of the Germans at his back.

"Set me down near the water," said Vermund, for he meant to throw himself in, if Uffe should lose.

The two Saxons set upon Uffe, and he took all their blows on his stout shield, twisting this way and that to meet them, for he did not dare to try Skrep unless he could deal a death blow with it. Vermund could hear that Uffe was not striking, and he rose from his litter, and walked to the river brim, so that his red robe trailed in the water, for he thought that Uffe did not know how to wield his sword.

UFFE THE SILENT

Then Uffe shouted, "Come at me, Saxon, and show why your prince chose you to help him fight! Don't skulk behind."

At this the Saxon fighter, wishing to be worthy of trust, rushed at Uffe alone. Then Skrep sang through the air, and dealt him a blow that hewed him in twain.

"That was Skrep," said Vermund, "where did it fall?"

One of his men made answer, "It fell neither on arm or leg, but through the body of the Saxon helper, and he is dead."

Then Vermund moved away from the water, and was now as eager to live as he had been to die.

Once more Uffe shouted in a loud voice, "Come forward, Saxon, avenge the man who died for you!"

Now these two sons of kings did not mingle their blows as if they had been churls, but struck in turn, as high-born fighters did in the olden days. The Saxon prince had lost a

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

man, so he struck first. Uffe might not flinch from the blow, nor try to turn it, but stood, and let him strike. The blade crashed on the woven mail, the trusted coat of rusty armour, and the links held, so it could not bite through.

Now it was Uffe's turn.

Uffe turned Skrep in his hands, as he was not sure which side was sharper, and lifted it high over his head, and brought it whistling down. The Saxon prince fell in two pieces on the ground.

"That was Skrep again," said Vermund, "how fares my son?"

"His foes are dead," came the answer, "and he has loosed his boat, and is coming in it to your side."

Then Vermund wept, and groped his way toward the shore until his hand felt the hard limbs of Uffe.

The Germans in shame and sorrow rowed to the island, and took away their dead, and Saxony came again under the Danish crown,

UFFE THE SILENT

but in the lofty hall of the Danes that night there was feasting and singing enough, and praising of Uffe.

Uffe sat silent through the singing, for there was no need for him to speak, and Vermund's hand lay ever on his arm.

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK



THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

I

The Windowless House

LONG years passed, and there came an evil time when a child of seven was king in Denmark.

One night they all sat feasting in the hall; hairy Koll, the boy-king's tutor, Gotwar his wife, whose mouth was like a quiver full of arrows, for she not only questioned like a woman, but answered, like a man, and their twelve sons, three of whom were called Grep, for they had all been born at once. The fight-

[107]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

ing men had no wars to keep them busy, so turned their time to wickedness.

In the high throne sat the boy-king, Frode, swinging his little feet above the floor, and talking with his sister Gunwar, well named the Fair. All the while, Grep watched Gunwar, with burning eyes, rolling his thick tongue in his cheeks, and smacking his lips, while the mead ran down his chin. As he drank, he forgot how a man of low birth should speak to a king, and said,

“Tell me, Frode, what you would do if I should wed Gunwar, tomorrow?”

Little Frode and his sister looked at each other, pale as death, wondering how a boy of seven and a maid could stand against twelve men, but Grep laughed, and fell so hard to drinking Gunwar’s health that he soon forgot her.

Then Gunwar fled silently to a strange house in the wood, which had no doors nor windows, but only a hole in the roof, Lapp-fashion. Little Frode sat the long night in the

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

hall, dozing on his throne, or waking to bitter anger, helpless.

When in the morning Grep found Gunwar gone, he bade her suitors to a feast, and slew them at the board, and set their bloody heads on poles; but he dared not go to the house in the wood, for it was a strange house to him, and he feared witchcraft.

The folk groaned under Koll and Grep, and no woman dared come to the hall, after Gunwar was gone, so no one patched the garments of the men when torn by briars.

"Frode must marry, and give us a queen," said Grep.

"I am too young," protested Frode, but they made him wed a nearby princess.

Now seven times the beech trees around Gunwar's house put forth green leaves above white starry flowers, and seven times the leaves fell in a copper carpet on the ground, and seven times the house lay silent under snow, and no help came.

At last Denmark's plight reached the ears

[109]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

of Gotar, King of Norway, and he called his men, and said,

"It is in my mind to free the Danes from these evil doers."

The Norwegians cheered.

"At the same time," Gotar went on, "I am likely to become the king of Denmark."

At this his men cheered even louder. One of them, called Erik, broad of chest and skilled in using words to cloak his meaning, thought on the boy-king, and thought more on the sister, and made a plan for his own good. When the shouting stopped, he rose and said,

"Why does the king himself go against the Danes? Why not send some men first, as a blacksmith uses tongs to save his hands?"

This wise saying delighted Gotar, and he praised Erik in front of them all, and bestowed on him then and there the name of "Shrewdspoken." Instead of being glad, Erik looked steadfastly at the floor.

[110]

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

"Now why are you cast down?" asked Gotar.

"Never before," said Erik, "have I seen a name bestowed without a gift to go with it."

"What will you have?" asked the king, laughing.

"A sword to cut with, a ship to ride in, or it might be, the fairest maiden in the world to wife."

Then Gotar gave him the ship Skroter, of which more will be told.

When the fleet of Norway sailed for Denmark, under Hrafn, Erik stayed behind, for he was minded to fare forth alone, if he fared at all, and find for himself the maiden in the windowless house. The Norwegian faring was unlucky, for Gotwar the sharp-tongued, the mother of Grep, bewitched the Danish swords to shine so bright that Hrafn and his men thought fire was flaming from them. Only six small ships brought tidings home to Gotar that Denmark was not light to overcome.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Then Erik thought that it was time.

He sailed from Norway in Skroter, with only his brother, and a few stout men, past the mountains of Norway, and the rocks of Sweden, until he came at last to shore on a far pebbly beach, in Denmark. There Erik's men were hungry, so they fell upon some cattle which they found, killed them, and carried them back to Skroter.

The tillers of the soil in that neighborhood were brave men, and when they found their cattle had been taken, they took small boats, and came against the robbers. Erik saw the sea black with their coming, and knew that they were too many to withstand.

"Tie ropes to the meat," he shouted to his men, "and hang it over the side of the ship, so that it is hidden in the water."

When the owners came up, Erik bespoke them sweetly.

"Be welcome on my ship," he said, "and search it if you like. Since it is too small to

[112]

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

have a hiding place, how can we be the men who took your cattle?"

The countryfolk did as he bade them, and went away bewildered. Then Erik and his men pulled in the meat, and ate it merrily.

Frode, now a stripling, had heard of a Norwegian ship off his northern shore, and sent the sea lord Odd, with seven ships against it. Erik saw them coming up at dusk.

"Strip, and go, and take shelter with Odd, and say I beat you," he said to two of his most trusted men, and they did so.

Odd greeted them kindly, and in the course of talk, told them that he meant to fall upon Erik at daybreak, when the Norwegians would be sleeping, and showed them heaps of stone for throwing, with which he had loaded his ships. As soon as night fell the spies slipped overboard and swam back to Skroter to tell these things to Erik.

"Now may the sea help us, or we are done." said Erik.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

With that he took a little boat, and rowed alone, without even a splash from his oar in the black water, out to the Danish fleet. He bored a hole in each of the seven ships, and when he thought he had bored enough, he rowed swiftly back to Skroter.

The night wore on. Just before dawn, Odd, who was sleeping in a tent high under the mast, was wakened by a wave which splashed his face. Springing up, he saw that his overladen ships were sinking, and he shouted to his men. They bailed and bailed, to get the water out, but the more they worked the more the sea poured in, and while they were busy Erik came up on Skroter. When the Danes stopped bailing to fight, their overladen ships sank under them, and they had to swim for their lives.

Erik rowed away, and landed peacefully in Denmark.

Grep met him on the shore, cursed him and called him "fool," but Erik only answered, pleasantly, "He who plots with his lord's

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

wife to betray his lord will set a snare for himself."

Grep had no answer for this, for he and the queen had indeed been false to Frode, so he rushed away to the hall, roaring to the sluggish men to come to arms.

"You should take more heed in making ready for the fray," said Frode, but Grep pushed him aside, and hurriedly gathered the men, and stuck a horse's head on a pole to be borne along ahead of them, thinking to frighten Erik by the sight.

But when Erik saw the horse's head, dreadful though it was, with its grinning teeth, he bade his men be of good heart, and put a little curse on it, saying,

"May evil reward the doers of evil."

At that the head fell from the pole, killing the man who bore it, and the Danes, afraid of their own witchcraft, hailed Erik, and led him to the king with all his men.

On the way, Erik sought for a gift to take to Frode, since for his own ends he wished to

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

have the friendship of the king, and made shift to snatch a piece of ice from the frozen road, and hide it in his cloak. At the hall, Grep's men played an uncouth jest on him, for they laid a slippery hide on the threshold, and jerked it away when he stepped on it, so that he would have fallen, had not his brother caught him from behind.

"Bare is the back of the brotherless," said Erik, and gracefully entered the hall.

Within, a roaring fire put the frost to flight, and slim young Frode, his smooth brow drawn in thought, sat on one side of it, with his queen. On the other were Koll and Gotwar, and their twelve sons, and all the best men of the Danes stamped to and fro, and warmed themselves.

Koll made no answer to the honied words of Erik's greeting, save to say,

"Have you a gift for the king?"

Erik drew the shining bit of ice from his cloak, and held it out to Koll across the fire, but when Koll snatched at it, Erik let it slip

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

into the flames. All the Danes cried out, for they had caught the shine of the ice as it fell into the fire, and thought that it was gold, which Koll had dropped. It was the law that any man who lost a gift meant for the king, should pay for it with his life.

"Shall Koll pay the penalty?" asked Frode.

Now there were many there who feared and hated Koll, and many thought that they could seize the power if he were gone, so they clashed their spears, and shouted,

"Let him die!"

Frode forthwith bade them hang Koll, glad in his heart to be rid of him. Then he turned to Erik and said,

"Erik Shrewdspoken, what words put Grep to fight?"

"He and the queen are false to you," answered Erik.

Frode turned to the queen, and read her guilt in her blushing face, and he was very angry.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

"From this day," he said, "let all men know that I am king here, and my word is law."

But Grep rushed at Erik, with a drawn sword, and Erik caught a spear, and ran it through him so that he fell dead. Grep's brothers sprang to their feet, and would have set upon Erik, but Frode's boyish voice rang out again,

"Did I not say that I was king? Those who wish vengeance must give a challenge."

"Then let Erik and ten of his men fight us!" they shouted.

"Gladly," answered Erik, "if I may say where the fighting shall be, and may have the hide of an ox, and three days in which to make ready."

The king agreed, and three days truce was called, in which Frode forgave the queen, since Grep was dead, and all were merry in the hall, save the eleven brethren of Grep. During these days, Erik busied himself in his room, but with all his work he did not


THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

forget the windowless house, nor the hidden maiden whom he wished to find.

On the third day, he heard glad shouts, and going to the door, beheld many of the folk, dancing about a woman wrapped in a dark cloak, who walked toward the hall. Erik came forth, and followed them. The woman crossed the hall, until she stood before Frode, and there she let her cloak drop to the ground. Frode rose up, and kissed her, and led her to the throne, for it was Gunwar the fair, who had heard of the death of Grep in her windowless house, and now came back, seven times more beautiful for each of the seven years that she had been away.

Erik looked on her, and for once he had no words.

Frode the Great

 **N** the morrow came the fighting with the brethren.

Erik had asked to meet them on the frozen sea, and he had cut the hide which he had asked for, into boots for himself and his men, so that their feet were firm upon the ice. Grep's brethren, unshod, slipped to and fro, missing their aim, and sometimes falling helpless before the foe. Thus it happened that they were all slain, and Erik and his men went in triumph to the hall, and the folk cheered them, shouting their praises, and celebrating the freedom from Grep and Koll with delight.

Only Frode looked on Erik with a frown, for when he had so newly struggled free from one yoke he was not minded to put his neck

[120]

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

under another, and he thought that Erik might be dangerous.

That night there was a feast in honour of the Norwegians. While the men were singing, and Erik was telling them strange tales of his adventures, Frode took a jewelled dagger from his belt, and weighed it in his hand, and eyed the space between him and the hero. Then Gunwar the beloved spoke sweetly from his side,

“He is not shrewd who does not take heed for himself.”

Erik was quick to feel a warning, and caught the flash of Frode’s dagger in the air in time to leap aside. The dagger struck the wall behind him, and quivered there until he drew it out, and bowing to the king, said,

“In my land we do not throw our gifts, we hand them. Nor do we give a dagger without its sheath.”

Young Frode bit his lip, but he did not wish to seem boorish when his guest was well

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

mannered, so he reluctantly unbuckled the sheath from his side, and handed that to Erik. Erik put the dagger in it, and stuck it in his belt, but he dared not thank Gunwar, for when he looked at her his wits failed him, and he had need of them.

The feast went on, fast flowed the ale, and loud sang the men, only the stripling king took no part in it, but sat with clenched hand. Gunwar rose from her seat, and went about filling the horns, doing honor to the heroes, bearing the foaming mead.

"May Gunwar fill my horn?" asked Erik, and she did so, but when she came to him he caught her hand with the horn, and held it fast.

"This gift is too much, O king," he said, "may I indeed have what I hold?"

"Take it," answered Frode, frowning, but thinking that he meant the horn.

Then Erik drew the maiden to him.

"Stop!" cried Frode, "Gunwar shall wed where she lists."

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

Erik drew his sword, saying, "It was overbold to take the whole, but what I hold was given me, so I may have the hand with the horn."

With that he made as if to cut it off, and Frode saw his mistake, but he was too young to dare to take back a foolish word, so he gave Erik the maiden. Then Erik looked at Gunwar and read her willing answer in her eyes.

Knowing that Frode would find some hindrance to their wedding, Erik took Gunwar, and fled with her that night to Skroter, and in the morning Frode came after them in a ship. But in the heat of the chase Frode fell into the sea, and Erik saved his life by drawing him out.

Frode, all unarmed, with water dripping from his mail stood on the deck of Skroter, and said to Erik,

"My life is in your hands, and now I pray that you will slay me without more ado, for it is bitter to me to be beholden to you."

But Erik handed Frode back his sword, and

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

said, "Let there be peace between us, and I will be your man, and fight for you. I want your friendship, not your crown."

So Erik came into Frode's band, and led his men, and Frode, unheeded in his youth, became a king wise and strong beyond all kings, and was called the Great.

It would take many books to tell of the deeds of Erik and Frode. How Erik, when he went against the Slavs, decked his fleet with green boughs, so that the foe thought it a wood, and saw the ships too late, or how the kings of the Huns and the Russians fell before him, or how he overcame the wild Finns, the uttermost folk of the earth, who by fastening curved boards (ski) on their feet, fly over the snow like birds, or how he took Britain, and the Orkneys.

Erik carried Frode's arms into every land, so that, when Frode ruled them all, there should be peace.

(About this time, there were indeed four

[124]

THE QUICK WIT OF ERIK

years of peace, for Our Lord was born, and fighting ceased throughout the world.)

Frode was great in peace as well as war, for he rewrote some laws and made others. No man might marry if he had not bought his wife, for Frode deemed that a husband would abide by his spouse if he had given money for her, also, a proven champion must stand his ground against three foes, but might fly from four without dishonor, also, he who gave shelter to a thief, must hang.

When in the fullness of time Frode died, such was his fame, and the fear which his name spread throughout the world, that for four years his men bore his embalmed body before them and feigned that he still lived.

STARKAD'S VOW



STARKAD'S VOW

I

The Vow

THIS is the vow that Starkad swore;
Starkad the warrior, Starkad the sea
rover, Starkad of giant birth, from
whom, when a babe, Thor himself had
wrenched four extra arms, Starkad, who came
to Denmark out of the Swedish forests. This
is his vow, and he swore it on the body of his
murdered king.

“I am Starkad, the grim and the faith-
ful, and I swear this vow by the body of

[129]


THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

my lord, Frode, whom I followed in his life.

“As I led his men over the spiked fields of the Russians, shod in wooden shoes, and as I hunted for him the swift-speeding Irish, who fight most as they fly, shaving their hair behind that none may grasp it, and casting their sharp spears backwards, and as I slew for him in single combat the King of the Saxons, so will I guard his children, nor will I rest till I avenge his death.”

When he had made this vow, Starkad the old, the best of the warriors, loathing the soft life of kings, withdrew from the court until he should be needed.

The Princess Defended

RODE, called the Generous, for he had increased the pay of the fighters, left two children, a son, Ingild, and a daughter, Helga. Ingild delighted in such unmanly dishes as roast fowl, had cooks prepare his food, loved spices, and even had men wait on him at the board, after the lazy German manner. He took no care of Helga, but let her flower into womanhood alone.

One day a goldsmith came to the hall, to show the king a well wrought armband. Ingild and his men were picking the back of a chicken with their fingers, as if they had been dainty women, throwing bones at each other in jest, and drinking their mead out of new fangled cups, instead of the good old horns.

[131]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

The smith saw that no one there awaited reverence, so he wandered about at his will.

In a corner he found a woman, dressed in rags, with her head buried in her arms. When she looked at him, and he saw her pale face, streaked with tears, and soft brown hair, and wide eyes, gray as dewy summer morn, he thought her fair, and asked,

“Who are you, and why do you weep?”

“Alas,” she said, “I am Helga, sister of the king, whom no one heeds.”

At this the goldsmith, bold as a lowborn man who fears no lord, bespoke her kindly, for he thought it would be fine to have the daughter of a king for his love. Next day he came again, with gifts, and lonely little Helga wept at his goodness. When he asked her to leave the hall where no one loved her, and come with him, Helga knew no answer to give but yes, for no one had been kind to her before.

The delighted goldsmith hastened to take her to his house, where he gave her fine

STARKAD'S VOW

clothes enough to cheer a maiden's heart, and kept her until such time as he should tire of her.

Starkad, in his distant fastness, heard that the daughter of the king dwelt with a churl, and he bethought him of his vow.

Only one day later, a beggar, his face hidden in a shabby cloak, sat at the goldsmith's door. In time Helga came into the red light of the forge, and behind her tripped the goldsmith, bedecked with ribbons and trimmed with fur, mincing and tripping as if he had been a dandy of Ingild's court.

The smith saw an old man, sitting on the threshold, and kicked at him with bejeweled shoes, saying,

"Begone, beggar. I have no crusts for you."

The old man made no answer, but a watcher might have seen him clench his fist.

Helga, pale even in the glowing light of the forge, sat without a word, and tears shone behind her dewy eyes. The smith danced over to her, flung himself down, and laying his

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

head in her lap bade her pluck the fleas out of his mantel. Helga, who all her life had done someone's bidding, began to put her slim fingers in the dirty fur, when she caught the flashing eyes of the old man in the doorway.

She sprang up, clasping her thin hands over her heart, and cried,

"Look to yourself, smith! Only one pair of eyes on earth hold heaven's lightning in their glance. Starkad is here!"

Starkad rose, silent and grim, and let fall his cloak, and the goldsmith stared at him, goggling and ashy faced. He thought of flight, but Starkad was between him and the door. He darted to and fro, and Starkad waited. At last he made a dash. Then a great sword swept through the air, and struck him to the floor.

Starkad stood over him, and sang,

"I am Starkad, faithful and changeless.

I strike the purse proud, the lacking in reverence.

I free the maiden, rebuke her, and take her home.

Thus I fulfill my vow."

[134]

STARKAD'S VOW

And Starkad delighted as much in the singing of these things as in the doing of them.

Helga went back to the hall, and Starkad found her a good husband in Helgi, King of Norway, but the vow was not yet fulfilled.

One called Anganty came with eight men on the wedding day, and challenged Helgi to fight for his bride. Helgi was much cast down, for he did not know who would come with him against so many, but Helga whispered the name of Starkad in his ear. Then Helgi sprang up gladly, for he knew that Starkad was bound by his vow to help, and the meeting was set for the morrow.

"I myself will watch over your sleep," said Starkad, when the bride and groom were led into the bridal chamber with mirth and flaring torches. He shut the heavy oaken door, tore off the iron bolt, and thrust his shining sword through the bars in its stead. Grim and burning eyed he sat beneath it, all the night.

Helgi awoke at dawn, and sprang up to make ready for the fray, but when he saw

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

how dark it was he bethought him that he might sleep a little longer. There Starkad found him dreaming, when it was time to go forth.

"I am Starkad," he said to himself, "who never has asked for help in a fight."

So he forbore to waken Helgi, and went alone to meet the nine champions.

Snow and sleet cut the winter wind, as Starkad strode alone to the hill of fighting.

The foe were not yet come when Starkad reached it, so he sat down in the snow, took off his cloak, and fell to cleaning it. After a time he doffed the purple tunic which Helga had given him, and hung it on some thorn trees. The snow fell thicker and thicker, and the sleet cut his bare body, but Starkad took no heed.

In due time the nine champions came up on the other side of the hill, and hearing no sound, built a fire to huddle about, shivering and chattering. At length one of them went to look for Helgi, and saw only an old man,

STARKAD'S VOW

buried up to his naked shoulders in the snow.

They made a ring about Starkad and asked if he were the man who had undertaken to fight them.

Starkad, not moving, not even looking at them, said, "Yes."

"Well, graybeard," laughed Anganty, "will you meet us one by one, or all at once?"

"I drive a pack of dogs off in a body, not singly," answered Starkad, still looking straight ahead.

While the angry champions were trying to think of something to say to this, Starkad got up slowly, shook the snow from his white hair, and from the thick white eyebrows which hid his frightful eyes, turned his back on them, and walked away to a rock. There he faced round, drew his sword, and spun it in his hand.

The nine champions rushed at him, howling like wolves.

Three armed with clubs came first, and three with swords behind, and three with

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

spears were last. Starkad raised his sword high with both hands, and swung it, and three heads rolled on the snow. For a moment the champions fell back, then, vaulting the bodies of their slain comrades, all six rushed on together. Again the red sword of Starkad swept through the air, and three more fell before it, but the spear of the fourth sank deep into his side, the sword of the fifth cut to the bone of his arm, and the sixth drove through his thigh.

Starkad killed the spearsman with a blow of his fist, tore the spear from his own side, and drove it through the fifth. Only Anganty, best of them all, was left.

They cut and thrust at each other, and fifteen times the sword of Anganty drank Starkad's blood, but at length Starkad clove both helm and shield, and slew him.

Then the old man himself sank helpless on the blood red snow.

Soon Starkad gathered his strength, and crawled to a nearby stream. But when he

STARKAD'S VOW

found the icy water foul with blood, he scorned to cool his parched throat, and dragged himself back to the rock, leaving a red trail behind him. To this day the rock bears the hollow made by his body as he rested against it.

Now day was high, and folk began to pass along the hill. First came a man in a cart, who saw Starkad lying half dead by the rock, and stopped to help him.

"Who are you," asked Starkad, "and what do you do?"

"I am the King's spy," answered the man.

"That is a shameful calling," said Starkad.

"Go away."

The spy left, and a man came by on foot, and offered help.

"Who are you?" asked Starkad again.

"I serve as bondsman to a jarl, to earn one of his slaves for my wife."

"The freeborn should not wed with slaves," said Starkad, "let me die in peace."

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

After the freeman came a woman, and she was tender and pitiful enough.

"If you have a child, go home and tend it," said Starkad, with the blood welling faster and faster from his wounds, "warriors have no need of women."

When the woman had gone, there came another young man in a cart.

"Who are you?" asked Starkad, again.

"I till the fields," answered the youth.

"That is a calling better than worldly honor," said Starkad, "so you may come and bind my wounds."

The young man bound them with withies, and Starkad, not to take help for nothing, gave him his purple tunic in return. Then the youth bore him to the cart, and drove him back to the hall.

While these things were passing on the hill, Helga awakened, and found Starkad gone and Helgi sleeping.

"Wake up," she cried to her husband, "for Starkad will come back and slay you. If you

STARKAD'S VOW

are brave enough to strike at him before he strikes at you, he may forgive you."

Even as she spoke, there came a thundering at the door. Starkad had sprung from the cart, heedless of pain, stridden through the halls like a well man, and was now in search of Helgi. He drove in the oaken door with a blow, and was in the room, with fire flaming from his look.


Though Helgi was half dead with fright, he sprang from his bed, as Helga had told him to do, and aimed his sword at the old man's head. The first blow was wild, and before he could strike again, Helga caught a shield, and ran between them. The sword knocked her to the floor, and Starkad saw that she had saved his life.

"Forbear to strike again," he said, "for since you are a brave man I forgive you."

Thus the first part of the vow was fulfilled.

Helga and Helgi sailed to Norway, and Starkad went back to his distant fastness, waiting.

The King Avenged

HILE the years passed, Starkad lived in his distant fastness, and Ingild feasted and reveled in Denmark. But when Starkad heard that Ingild had wed the daughter of Swerting, Frode's murderer, and feasted with Swerting's sons, he travelled back to Denmark with unbelievable speed, over his secret road.

Ingild was hunting, and the gay queen was feasting and toying with the jarls, when she saw a fierce old man, clad only in a ragged tunic, striding in at the door. He came up the hall, looking neither to right nor left, and without speaking, took his seat at the head of the board.

The queen set down her cup, and called to him,

[142]

STARKAD'S VOW

"How now, old man? Have you never been in the halls of princes before? And have you never learned which is the seat of honor? Only the great may sit at the head of the board."

The old man got up without a word, and went to a lowly seat amidst the strangers. Then he strode to the far end of the hall, and flung himself against the timbers with such a crash that the beams nearly fell in.

Just then, Ingild came in from the hunt.

He saw the fierce old man, and by his hard hands, and his scarred face, and the lightning of his eyes, knew that it was Starkad, and bidding him welcome, led him back to the high seat.

The queen hastily changed her manner, and with her own hands set before him dainty meats, which had been both boiled and roasted. Starkad spurned them, wroth at the Teuton extravagance of cooking a meat twice.

"Raw meat is the strong man's dish," he

[143]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

said, and he took a dry rump of ham, and a crust of bread.

He sat there, eating, and looking straight ahead of him. With a smile of false sweetness, the queen took a band of carved gold from her hair, and laid it in Starkad's lap. He said nothing, but his eyes flashed fire at the thought that a fighter should deign to wear a woman's headdress, and he flung it back in her face.

Then the queen turned cold with fear for her brothers, who were at the feast, for she knew of Starkad's vow. She called to her piper, who had taken the place of the old fashioned harpist, and bade him woo Starkad, with sweet music, and amusing mimicry. The piper played both high and low, acting first one part, and then another, making faces, and dancing about on his toes. Starkad, who abhorred these tricks of the stage, did not look at him. When he had eaten he took the bone of his ham and flung it at the piper, driving

[144]

STARKAD'S VOW

the wind from his cheeks, and the music from his heart.

Then Starkad rose in his place, casting a flaming look about the room, and sang,

"I am Starkad, shaper of the world.

On the right hand of Frode I sat in this hall,
But his son has forgotten the deeds of his father.

Here at the board where strong men took their
well earned rest from fighting, I find only glut-
tony and mumming.

Twice cooked meats, and wine in bowls,
Cakes with syrup, turnips, strained,
Dainty shellfish, and roast fowl,
Food fit for the rattlebrained.

I would that the renown of Frode had not been
forgotten.

Between the seas which ring around the land,
upon the earth, under the stars and the sun, there
is nothing but shame for the son who does not
avenge his father."

Ingild gave no heed to Starkad when he
began to sing, but before the song had done

[145]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

he felt a long forgotten love for his father burning in his heart.

At the end, Ingild sprang from his seat, and took a sword, and Starkad took another. Then giving stroke for stroke and blow for blow, they hewed down the sons of Swerting where they sat, giving them the death which they had dealt to Frode.

Thus was the vow fulfilled.

Ingild awoke to manhood, and Starkad, bidding him farewell, went back to the distant fastness where he dwelt, and there was no fear in his heart, save of a quiet death.

MODEST SYRITHE



MODEST SYRITHE

SATHER," said Syrithe, "grant me one boon. Betroth me only to the man who can make me lift my eyes to him."

For you must know that Danish maids were too modest in old days to betray their hearts by casting eyes at men, and Syrithe was the most modest of them all.

"Have your way," answered King Sinald.

The next day, and every day thereafter, wooers came to the hall to sue for the hand of Syrithe. Some sang with the harp, some spoke honied words, some showed their skill

[149]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

in sword play. Syrithe listened to them all, with downcast eyes.

None of the wooers was braver, or better born, or handsomer, or more in love, than Otther Ebbeson.

"You are like dawn on ice-capped peaks," he sang, "and your golden hair gleams like distant sunshine." But Syrithe was unmoved.

"I have slain dragons, and nine men at once," said Otther, but Syrithe still looked down, and at last he went sadly away, wondering at her steadfastness.

Then came a lover who was not so kind as Otther, Rorick, the outlaw of the hills, who said, "Look up, Syrithe, and be quick about it. I am not a man to ask twice for what I want."

Syrithe sat as if she had been carved in snow.

"Do not make me waste my time," said Rorick, "what I do not get in one way I shall take in another," but Syrithe sat with downcast eyes, and Rorick strode away.

[150]

MODEST SYRITHE

A strange woman came to the hall next day, and asked to be a handmaiden to Syrithe, and Syrithe took her to the maiden's bower. It was a cloudless spring, with little white flowers dancing in the grass, and the woman said,

"I know a place in the woods where tall lilies grow, and if you will follow me I will lead you thither."

"Gladly," answered Syrithe, and they left the hall.

Deeper and deeper into the woods they went, twisting in and out, until Syrithe did not know where she was. When the hall was out of sight and hearing, the woman laughed, and threw off her cloak and veil. To her horror, Syrithe saw that it was Rorick. She screamed, but no one heard her. As she turned to fly, Rorick caught her by her golden hair, slung her on his shoulder, and made off to his den in the hills.

When Syrithe did not come home, they sought for her, and found only a strand of

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

golden hair on a bush, and a belt which had belonged to Rorick. The next day there was mourning in the hall, and, as it happened, Otther passed, and heard the wailing of the women. When they told him that Syrithe was lost, he did not wait for more, but ran off on foot to the wild hills, and began to look, day and night, in all the hidden crannies. At last one morning, he peered cautiously into the mouth of a cave, and saw the shine of Syrithe's hair in its depths.

Otther gave a shout, and Rorick rushed out, brandishing a club. Otther struck at him and sent the club spinning to the ground, but his own sword broke in the blow, and they fell upon each other hand to hand. Rorick was strong as a bear, but Otther was skillful, and at last he threw the outlaw, and plunged a hunting knife into his throat. Then he went into the cave, and took the soft white hand of Syrithe, and led her forth into the sunlight. Syrithe gazed in modest silence at the ground.

The robber had knotted her long soft

MODEST SYRITHE

tresses into a thong, meaning to bind her with them, and Otther tried to untangle them, while he told her of his love. When the knots proved stubborn, he wiped the blood from his hunting knife, and sheared them off.

All this time, Syrithe sat still, with white eyelids veiling her blue eyes, and when Otther saw that he could not move her, he scorned to take her by force as the outlaw had done, but sadly let her go her way, and she wandered off alone, like a strayed lamb.

Days and nights passed, and Syrithe had no shelter. At last she was glad when she saw a small hut, and hurried up to it. A bent old crone came out and called to her in a croaking voice,

“Come hither, maiden. I will take you in.”

But when Syrithe ran up, the hag caught her arm, dragged her into the hut, and threw her on the floor, cackling,

“I need a goat herd, and you will do. Do not try to escape me, for I can ride the winds, and race the waves, and you will only earn a

[153]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

beating. You shall stay here until your soft fingers knot as mine have done, and your white skin is like leather. Now come and I will show you your bed."

Syrithe got up, pale and silent, and followed the witch into the goatshed. The crone pointed with her long hooked nose to a filthy pile of straw, and went out. Syrithe sat down, lost and alone.

The days toiled by, and Syrithe's bondage to the witch was even more bitter than her bondage to Rorick, for whereas before she had at least had a dry cave for shelter, now she lay among the goats, and they tramped on her with their small sharp hooves. No matter how far she took them, when she led them out to graze, if she turned around she could always see the witch behind her, watching. By night she brought them home and slept with them, and she learned the fear of beatings and of hunger.

But Otther had not forgotten her snowy whiteness, nor the distant sunshine of her



Syrthe . . . did not feel the flame . . .

MODEST SYRITHE

hair, and he found her again, moving pale
and still among the goats.

"Come with me," he said, taking her
hand, "for the witch cannot withstand a man,
and once you are beyond her eyesight you are
safe."

Then he led her a long way, to a mossy
rock, and sat down beside her, and sang,

"Raise your cold white eyelids, maiden,
And look at me.
Long I loved you, twice I sought you,
And set you free.

"It is brainsick to be choosing
Always to roam.
Lift your eyes, and I will take you
In safety home."

But Syrithe sat as if she had been carved
in snow, and now indeed she dared not raise
her eyes, for fear he should see the love in
them.

When Otther saw that she was as modest as
ever, and that nothing could shake her, he
turned sadly away, and strode off down the

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

hill. Syrithe watched him, until he was out of sight, and then she got up and wandered off, elfwild, as before.

On and on she roamed, until her clothing was torn by the briars, and she was covered with dirt, and scratched and torn. By night she slept on the heather, by day she wandered, feeding on such grasses and berries as she could find, and drinking from the springs that bubbled in the rocks. At last, weary and forlorn, she came to a great house, and asked for shelter.

It was Otther's house, though Syrithe did not know it, and Otther was hunting, so they took her in to his mother. Syrithe was so filled with shame for her ragged dress, and her hapless plight, that she did not wish to say that she was a princess, but made her plea humbly.

"Lady, have pity on a homeless waif, fatherless, and motherless. Take me in, and I will wait upon you faithfully."

Otther's mother marked her high bearing, and her pale proud beauty, and said,

[156]

MODEST SYRITHE

"You cannot be low born. My hand-maidens will give you clothing, and you shall come and sit beside me."

She gave Syrithe water to wash in, and food to eat, and Syrithe, still not knowing where she was, took a high seat at the board, as the good lady bade her. There she was sitting when Otther came in, and at sight of him, she could not tell which way to look. But Otther made as if he did not know her.

"Tell me, stranger," he said, "why do you hide your face in a linen napkin? There is no one here whom you need fear to look upon."

Then he sat down at her side, as if he had never seen her before. When it came into his heart to make a last trial of her, he said,

"Mother, make ready a feast, for I have found a bride, and shall wed her tonight."

His mother understood his meaning, and the feast went forward. The mirth was high, and Otther led the jesting, but Syrithe ate no food, for she was choked with tears. Still she would not raise her eyes.

[157]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

"Fair stranger," said Otther, at last, "the time is come. Will you not take the torch, and light me to my chamber, with my bride?"

Syrithe took the torch and stood before the richly woven hangings, which veiled the door, and the light falling on her hair turned it to shining gold, but she was pale as snow. Otther delayed in coming, but Syrithe did not mark the flight of time, for her heart was filled with woe. The torch burnt down, and scorched her fingers, but the fire in her heart was so fierce that she did not feel the outer flame.

At last Otther came to her, and called her by name.

"Syrithe," he said, "dear modest Syrithe, do not suffer for my sake. Give me the torch."

At this last proof of tenderness all her steadfastness melted away, and she slowly raised her deep blue eyes to his, and looked at him with unutterable love. And when the feast came to an end, it was Syrithe who followed Otther into the bridal chamber.

THE FAITHFUL MAIDEN



THE FAITHFUL MAIDEN

SOW different are my two suitors!" said Signe, daughter of king Sigar, looking at them from her high seat on the gold decked hall.

"Now there is Hildigsleff, the German, who thinks of nothing but his fair hair, and his fine shape, and there is Hakon of Norway, who is ugly, but renowned for brave deeds. Some maidens like a bragging walk, and boasting, and fine clothes, but I am a girl who cares more for the inner manliness than for the outward seeming."

All the while that she was speaking in

[161]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

praise of Hakon, she looked with loving eyes on Hagbart, son of the kinglet Hamund, for maidens do not like to betray their hearts too openly.

When Hildigsleff saw that he was rejected, and that she meant Hagbart, when she praised Hakon, he tossed his mane of golden hair, and threw his embroidered cloak around him, and swaggered out to find the blind man, Bolwis.

Now King Sigar kept two blind old men at the hall, to tell him what he should do about everything. Bilwis, of the broad smooth brow, always gave rede that was full of peace and love, but crooked Bolwis, whose face was twisted and wrinkled like his body, spoke always of strife and hatred.

"Bolwis," said Hildigsleff, "they are scoffing at me now in the hall, because Signe will not have me. I will give you a great bag of gold, if you will find a way to get rid of Hagbart."

Bolwis grinned, and rubbed his hands together. Then he shuffled into the hall, and

THE FAITHFUL MAIDEN

tapping with his stick on the ground in front of him, felt his way to Hagbart, who was sitting with his two brothers. Bolwis crept round behind one of them, and stuck his long nose almost in his ear, whispering.

“Sons of Hamund, do you know that the sons of King Sigar are planning to break their faith with you, and to kill you in your sleep tonight?”

Hagbart did not hear Bolwis, for under cover of the feasting he was plighting his troth with Signe, but one of his brothers leapt up, crying,

“Woe to the false sons of King Sigar. Let them meet us, and learn what it is to fight face to face!”

The sons of King Sigar were angry at being called false, though they did not know what it was all about, and they sprang up and took the challenge. Hildigsleff, standing where all could see him, threw back his cloak, and swept out his sword, and cried that he would fight at their side, and Hagbart, with

[163]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

a breaking heart, went to help his brothers.

They met before the hall. When three or four blows had been exchanged, Hildigsleff dropped his sword to run away, and was wounded in the back so that the scar was a shame forever after, not only to him but to all Germans. But Hagbart, bravely defending himself and his brothers, was so unlucky as to kill two of Sigar's sons, and had to fly to the woods.

Some days after, Signe was sitting in the maiden's bower, with her listless hands lying idle in her lap, and a heap of untouched wools on the floor beside her, when she suddenly saw a tall woman in the door way, wearing armour over flowing robes, and a bright veil.

"I am a shield maiden," said the woman, "and I come with tidings for Sigar, from the warrior maid of the North."

"Go and get water to bathe the stranger," cried Signe to her handmaidens, and when they were gone she threw herself into the

THE FAITHFUL MAIDEN

arms of the woman, for she knew that it was Hagbart, braving deadly danger to come back to her.

In all too short a time, the maidens brought the water in a basin, and leading the woman to a bench, knelt before her, to do off her shoes.

“What hard and hairy feet you have!” they cried in bewilderment.

“If you knew how I have wandered over hard sand, sharp thorns, cold ice, and gray cliffs, you would only wonder that my feet are not quite worn away,” answered the stranger.

“But you are so hard all over!” said the maidens, feeling the hands and arms of the woman.

“When I go weighed down with heavy armour, and shod in iron boots, and am brought up to be always fighting, it is no wonder that my body is not so soft as yours, which is wrapped in fine linen, and soft wool and silk.”

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

"You must not forget that this is a warrior maiden," cried Signe, hastily, "who handles weapons, and rows on the sea, and cannot be like one who does only woman's work. We go scarcely once a year outside our bower, and we must not reproach her that her hands are not so soft as ours."

But the maidens wondered, none the less, and a little dark one scuttled away to find Bolwis.

Now the unknown guest must of course have the best bed that could be found, and share the room of Signe, the only daughter of the king. When the door was closed, and they were alone, Hagbart took Signe in his arms, saying,

"If your father finds me here, he will kill me, and what will you, my very dearest, do when I am dead?"

"If Wierd should let you die for my sake, I will not live a day without you. Whether you are burnt, or drowned, or hung, or slain in your bed, I will die the same death. Of

THE FAITHFUL MAIDEN

my own free will I have given you my love,
and of my own free will I will die with you,
and though I plight my word like a woman,
I will keep it like a man."

Hagbart, filled with joy and tenderness, began to tell her of his love, and their happiness in being together was greater than their fear of danger, for a time. But the little dark handmaiden had gone to Bolwis, and Bolwis had hurried to the king.

Suddenly Hagbart heard the clanking of armed men outside the door of the room, and knew that he was lost. With a last kiss for his true love, he took his sword, and made ready to sell his life as dearly as he could. Many of the king's henchmen fell before his blows in the doorway, but in the end they overcame him, and led him away to the hall.

In the gray dawn the king held council, to see what should be done with Hagbart, and found the folk of two minds about him. All of the moot stood about the hall, resting on their spears. Bilwis and Bolwis sat on the

[167]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

left and right of the king, and Hagbart stood alone, like a brave man, in front of him.

Bilwis spoke first, and said kindly, "Surely it is better to use a brave man, than to hang him," and many about the hall cheered at his words. But Bolwis croaked, "The king must not forget to avenge the blood of his sons."

Then most of them who were there clashed their spears on their shields, and voted with Bolwis, and the king sent word that a gallows should be set up on a hill nearby.

All this while Signe was weeping bitterly in her bower, and she gathered her handmaidens round her, and said between her tears,

"You loved me, in the past, will you now follow me in what I do?"

"Even unto death," answered the maidens, weeping with her, and they gave her their hands on it.

"Then," said Signe, "when you see that

[168]

THE FAITHFUL MAIDEN

my beloved is dead, set fire to the bower, and hang yourselves in your ribbons, and I shall do the same."

Then the maidens took their bright ribbons, and gay bits of embroidered cloth, and tied them together, spotting them with tears, the while. They gathered brush and piled it all about the room, they took torches in their hands, and climbed upon the benches, and tied the colored ropes they had woven around the rafters, and about their necks.

Signe went among them, and poured out mead for them all, that they might die the more bravely, and then she herself climbed up on a bench near the window. For a time there was silence in the bower, save for a few sobs. The maidens stood on the benches, with their bright ribbons decking their necks, and their torches held high, while the tears ran unheeded down their cheeks.

Meantime Hagbart walked bravely among the fighters to the hill where he should be

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

hung. Instead of fear, his heart was full of love for his darling, and of a longing to test her faith, so when he came to the gallows he said, laughing,

“Be kind enough to hang my cloak before you hang me, for I have a fancy to see how I shall look when I dance in the air.”

This seemed harmless enough, so they tied the cloak to the rope, and Signe from her window saw a dark shape dangling from the gallows tree. With a great cry, she threw her torch into the heap of brush and kicked her bench from under her, and her maidens did the same. Then the swift flames wreathed the little white shapes that hung by bright cords from the rafters.

When Hagbart saw fire bursting from the maiden's bower, he shouted for joy, and said,

“Be quick, and speed me to my love! Now you cannot make an end of me too soon! Let the world know that our love was greater than death!”

[170]

THE FAITHFUL MAIDEN

So Hagbart went gladly to his end, like a brave man, and the place where he was hung is still called after him. If further proof be need of the story of these faithful lovers, there is a little hill to be seen in that field, to this very day.

THE WHITE HOUND OF OLUFF



THE WHITE HOUND OF OLUFF

OLUFF SIWARDSON was a fighter from his boyhood.

In those days Denmark knew fifty years of peace, and King Harald hired great Bearsarks, so called because they wore sarks of bearskin, to fight with his men, and keep them busy. All who would be followers of Harald, must meet a test by fighting a Berserk. With their sharp whirling swords they would try to shave off each other's eyebrows without cutting the flesh, and if any man flinched or drew back, he had to leave the hall, and lose his pay.

"Let me take the test!" cried young Oluff

[175]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

of Norway, when he came to the hall of his uncle the king.

"You are too young," said Harald, but Oluff had his way, and not only did he stand his ground while the sword of the Berserk played round him, but the look in his eyes was so terrible that his foe scarcely dared strike at him. When it came his turn to show his skill, he not only shaved the Berserk's eyebrows off, but trimmed his beard, and did not scratch him.

All crowded around to praise him, and the king said,

"Young though you are, you are worthy to join my band if you will do one more feat. Scate and Hiale, from whom no maiden is safe, have threatened to take Elsa, daughter of the King of Wermland, and her father and brothers are afraid to fight for her. To reach her you must go through a forest in which skulk the robbers, Gunn, ruler of Tellemark, and Grim his son. Slay them, save the maiden, and come back to me."

[176]

THE WHITE HOUND OF OLUFF

"Now I am thankful to be old enough for a fight 'at last," cried Oluff, "and I will go gladly, if you will give me a horse, a dog, some armour, and a sword."

Then the king sent for a tall white steed, and a fierce white hound, and shining armour, and a stout sword, and gave them to Oluff.

"My sword shall be called Logthi!" shouted Oluff, buckling on the armour. Then he sprang on his horse, and called his hound, and galloped off.

Before long he came to the great water, and had himself ferried across to the forest of the robbers. It was winter. Oluff scanned the snow closely as he rode along with his white hound leaping beside him, and before long he saw the footsteps of a man.

He followed the footsteps up a hill, and down a hill, to a roaring river. The river hissed between its snow covered banks, and foamed in its rocky bed, but brave Oluff drove his horse into it and his dog plunged

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

after. They fought through the icy water, and at last stood safe on the other side.

Oluff found an opening in the sheer black cliffs before him, and when he went through it he came to a hall, with stables around it, which were full of fine horses. Oluff went cheerfully from stall to stall, turning the horses out, and was about to put his own in their place, when Tok, a follower of Gunn, rushed at him from the hall.

Oluff whirled around, and catching Tok's onslaught on his shield, ran into him so hard that he fell to the ground. Oluff scorned to soil bright Logthi with lowborn blood, so he tore Tok limb from limb with his bare hands, and flung him back into the door of the hall.

Then Grim leapt the bit of Tok on the threshold, and Gunn sprang from a window, and they made at Oluff, shouting, "Impudent boy!"

He let them come, hiding the point of his sword under his shield until they were near. Then he whirled the shield aside, and

[178]

THE WHITE HOUND OF OLUFF

Grim ran headlong onto the sword. Oluff swung Logthi in an arc, and cut Gunn down. They lay on the ground, and Oluff stood above them.

Grim raised himself in a pool of blood, and called to his father,

"We are slain, but we may still die bravely, cutting off the hands of Oluff ere we go, and taking him with us to the grave."

"That would bring us renown," answered Gunn, so they struggled to their knees, and hacked at Oluff again.

They could cut at Oluff beneath his shield, and they held their own shields over their heads, so that he could not come at them. Grim hacked his legs, while he struck at Gunn, and Gunn pierced him when he turned on Grim. Though these were dying men, it would have gone hard with Oluff, had not his white hound sprung into the fray, and seized Grim by the throat. Then Oluff struck through Gunn, and so they both were slain.

Oluff himself was sorely wounded. While

[179]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

he lay panting on the ground his hound came and licked his wounds until the blood stopped flowing, and he had strength to rise again. He hung the bodies of the robbers on gibbets, so that all might see what he had done, went into their house, took their treasure and hid it where he might find it later. Then he went on his way to Elsa, riding his great white horse, and followed by his hound.

When Oluff came to Wermland, he hid his horse in the woods, put a cloak of rags over his shining armour, and went with his dog, on foot, to the hall of the king. There, dressed as a poor man, he took a low place at the board.

The king sat in a high throne, and his sons about him, but there was no sound of laughter or of jesting in the silent hall. The men at the feast might have been dead men, for they did not move or speak, but stared sorrowfully ahead. Then Oluff said to a son of the king,

“Why is there sorrow in this house?”

“Alas,” answered the king’s son, “today

[180]

THE WHITE HOUND OF OLUFF

Scate and Hiale have sent word that they are coming after our sister, and she has no champion."

Oluff stood up, still hiding his face under his hat, and called to the king,

"What shall the man have, who fights for your daughter?"

"He shall have the maid herself," answered the king.

Then Oluff was more eager than ever for the coming fight.

Elsa rose up, at the words of the stranger, and took a torch in her hand. It was her way to hold a light before the face of any unknown man who came to the hall, and to look at them closely, for in this way, she said, she could read their birth and character. She went swiftly down the silent hall, like one who is sure of herself, and the smoke from the torch streamed like a veil behind her, until she reached Oluff, and peered into his face.

When she met his eyes she fell to the floor.

Again she took the torch, and held it up,

[181]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

and again she fell before his piercing glance. She tried to peer at him a third time, and his blazing look struck such fright into her, that again she dropped to the ground, and lay there like one in a swoon, unable to see day or door.

“What ails my daughter?” asked the king.

Little by little the power of speech came back to her, and she rose from the floor, and said,

“I am stricken by the eyes of the stranger. He must be of the blood of kings.”

When they heard this, the king and his sons rushed forward, and flung themselves at Oluff's feet, begging him to fight for Elsa, and she herself said,

“Kingly stranger, if you will save me, I will live and die with you.”

Oluff swept off his hat, and the brightness of his golden curls lit up the shadows where he stood, and all cried out at his beauty, but he kept his eyes tight shut for fear of frightening them.

[182]

THE WHITE HOUND OF OLUFF

"Keep your hearts from sorrow," he said, "for I shall be your champion."

Then there was as much gladness in the house as there had been mourning, and the king and his sons laughed and called for ale, and even the bondsmen were merry, until suddenly they heard a hammering at the door, and a great voice without, crying,

"Bring Elsa out, or come and fight for her. Hiale and Scate are here, with twelve stout men."

Oluff ran to the door, and threw it wide.

"Elsa has found a champion," he shouted, "Meet me face to face, like men, do not set upon me from behind, and I will come and fight you all."

Hiale and Scate laughed aloud at the thought of meeting only one stripling, and agreed to his terms. Then all within the hall rushed out, reddening the night with the glare of their torches, and set forth through the woods, to find a meeting place.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

First went Hiale and Scate, with twelve hairy men, and their swords clanked as they walked. Then came Oluff, slender and tall, his helm gleaming red in the torchlight, and his left hand resting on the head of his ghost white hound, who slunk beside him. After him the Wermlanders jumped and shouted, and in their midst walked Elsa, with flowing hair and trailing cloak, holding a torch.

They stopped on an island in the midst of a black swamp.

Hiale and Scate and their twelve men, drew up on one side of an open space, and Oluff stood alone on the other, with Logthi glittering in his hand, and the hound a white shadow at his side. The Wermlanders made a ring around them, and Elsa stepped forward with her torch to light the fighting. Between them lay the unbroken snow, and about them towered the silent trees.

Then the outlaws set four of their men at Oluff. One felt the bite of Logthi in his heart, and one felt the hound at his throat,

THE WHITE HOUND OF OLUFF

and two more fell, cut through by the sweeping sword. Oluff dropped his shield, and caught a sword out of the hand of one of the dead men, and shouted to the others to come on.

All ten ran forth at once. Two slipped in the blood on the snow, and were trampled by their followers. The hound flashed like a white streak from the shadow, and bore two more to the ground, and tore out their life, with his sharp teeth. Oluff stood whirling two red swords round and round in front of him, and those who tried to pass that flashing screen fell dead.

Only Hiale and Scate were left, but Oluff was weary, and they were fresh. Oluff's right hand hung useless at his side, but he held Logthi in his left, and gave blow for blow. The hound, with blood red feet, and blood dripping from his jaws, sprang up and sank his teeth in Hiale's arm. As Hiale fell back, Oluff felled Scate, and then struck a sweeping blow at Hiale. He cut through one side,

[185]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

and out the other, and deep into the hound who hung on Hiale's arm.

Hiale fell dead, and the smitten hound with him.

Then Oluff dropped his sword, and falling on his knees beside the hound, stroked it with his whole hand. The hound looked at its master, licked his face, and died.

Then the king and his sons rushed forward, and lifted Oluff to their shoulders, and shouting and singing took him back to the hall, but Elsa dropped behind, and gathered up the body of the hound, and bore it in her arms.

That night Oluff was wed to Elsa, and later he became the king of Denmark, and the hound was given the burial of a hero, on a pyre which could be seen even from the sea.

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL



THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

I

To Learn of This World

AS the earth grew older, men thought less of fighting one another like wild beasts, and began to long for knowledge of the world they lived in.

Then there came to the throne of Denmark, a king called Gorm, both great and wise, for where others thirsted after war, he thirsted after learning, and delighted in strange tales of distant lands. One day, Thorkill, a sea-rover, said to him,

[189]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

"Gorm, all of your wealth is only a pinch of sand. You have not seen riches until you see the hidden stores of Gierrod."

"Who is Gierrod, and where is his treasure?" asked Gorm.

"That is a far journey," answered Thorkill, "for you must sail beyond the light of the sun and the stars, and drop over the edge of the world, to the place which is dark forever."

Gorm thought on these things until the longing to know the unknown beat down his fear, and he declared that he must go to Gierrod. Three hundred of his stoutest men asked to go with him.

"Thorkill," said Gorm, "you know the way. You shall lead us."

"And if I do," said Thorkill, "we must make ready to meet a fierce sea."

So they bound their ships with cords, and riveted them with iron nails, and covered them over with ox hide, to keep out the wild spray, and filled them with food. Then they

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

set forth, singing, in their three leaping sea-horses, one hundred men in each, but they had sailed no farther then Heligoland, when a great wind blew them from their course.

For days they tossed helplessly about the sea, until they had no food, except a little broth which they made from bones. Then a storm came up, to add to their woe.

But at last through the lightning and thunder they heard a distant roar, like breakers on a rocky coast, and they sent a boy up the mast, who shouted down that they were in sight of land.

The men in all three ships rushed to the prows, and soon they too could see sharp cliffs frowning up from the water. Then they made haste to beach their boats, and clambered out.

"Do not anger the guardians of this dangerous isle," cried Thorkill, "if you find their cattle, take only enough to stay your hunger."

But the men had been without food for days, and were not in a mood to heed wisdom, so they sprang up the cliffs, and found a fat

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

herd on the top. The peaceful cattle went on grazing without fear, for they had never seen the children of men before on that island. Then the Danes slew great numbers of them, rolling their bodies down the rocks, and filled the boats. Now it was dark.

They rowed a little out to sea, in their high ships, but while they were waiting for the dawn, they were wakened by an unearthly light. On the beach roared a crowd of giants, and one of them, with a bristling club in his hand, was striding over the water as if it had been dry land. When he reached the shivering travellers, he seized a high prow in his hand, and towering above the masts, thundered out,

"You have robbed the gods! Now you must give up one man from every ship, before you leave this shore."

"Wretched men," cried Thorkill, "you would not take my warning! Now we can only cast lots to see who shall go."

So in each ship they heaped together light

[192]

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

and dark bits of wood, and he who drew the darkest bit was given to the giant. The giant took the three men in one hand, and stalked back to shore, stepping on the crests of the waves. When he had reached the land, their drooping sails filled, though they felt no wind, and the ships glided swiftly away.

After some days they came to Permland.

It was a snowbound country, of roaring waterfalls, and trackless forests, and barren fields. No grain or grass grew in the aching cold, but every sort of fearsome beast haunted the dark woods.

"Draw the ships ashore," said Thorkill, "for here begins the way to Gierrod. If man or monster should come up to us, say nothing, but let me be your spokesman."

This time the Danes were eager to give heed to him. While they were pitching a few small tents on a wide bare shore, the figure of a giant loomed up in the dusk, with his head overtopping the trees. Nearer and nearer he came, and the wayfarers huddled together,

[193]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

but Thorkill stepped forth and shouted bravely,

"Hail, Gudmund, brother of Gierrod, friend of the wanderer!"

"Why do your men say nothing?" roared Gudmund in a voice like a waterfall.

"They are abashed because they do not speak your tongue," answered Thorkill.

"Well, then, come and be my guests," rumbled Gudmund.

At these words, giant carts appeared, drawn by giant horses, and it was light. The Danes climbed in, and were driven away, to a mighty river, which was arched by a bridge of solid gold.

"Take us over, Gudmund," cried Thorkill, "that we may boast of having crossed the golden bridge."

"Foolhardy man," roared Gudmund, in a voice like distant thunder, "that bridge divides the world of men from the world of monsters. No mortal foot may cross it."

The carts sped on to the high and hidden

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

dwelling of Gudmund. There Thorkill again warned his men, saying,

"When we go in, eat nothing, drink nothing, touch no one. He who takes food, or mead, or has to do with the giants, will forget the world of men, and stay here with the monsters all his life."

Inside the hall the beams were so high that the men could hardly see them when they looked up, the table was as large as a ship, and twelve giants, sons of Gudmund, and twelve fair daughters sat about it. The Danes huddled as far away as they could, and the feast began.

Soon Gudmund roared out, "Your king is not eating. Does he dislike my fare?"

"By no means," answered Thorkill, quickly, "but a change in food may bring a pain in the stomach, and the king looks to his health."

Thus balked, Gudmund tried another trap.

"My daughters are fair, and I have three

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

hundred of them, so each of you may have one to wife, if you will."

But for the warning glance of Thorkill the travellers were likely to have taken this offer. Four of them, indeed, thinking that he was a spoilsport, rose up, and put their arms around four of the lovely giant maidens. Then understanding left them, and they were mad forever.

But Gudmund had hoped to catch the king and Thorkill, so he said,

"Come and see the unheard-of fruits, which grow in my garden."

"Alas," answered Thorkill, "the lot of warlike men is hard, and we must again be on our wayfaring."

Then Gudmund knew that his three tricks had failed, because of the shrewdness of Thorkill, and hiding his rage, he ferried the Danes across the river, all but the foolish four.

On the other bank something loomed like a cloud in the distance, and when they came

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

nearer they saw that it was a walled town, with the heads of dead men, stuck on poles, to make a fence about it. The only gate was guarded by a pack of grinning giant dogs.

Thorkill smeared a horn with fat, and threw it to the dogs, and then, when they began to worry it, the men passed by unscathed. The gate was at the top of the wall instead of on the ground, but Thorkill found a ladder, and they climbed up to the gruesome town.

Here there were no houses, only caves in towering cliffs. The narrow ledges were slippery with a foul smelling mud, and thick with gray and shrieking ghosts. On the very peak they found the opening to the home of Gierrod.

A dank odor of death came out of it, and the Danes were frozen to the spot with fear.

"Take heart," said Thorkill, "but when you come in, do not lay hands on any of the treasures, for if you do you will never be able to let go of them again. Now Gorm and I

[197]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

will go first, with two stout men, and the rest of you can fall in behind, four by four."

Broder and Buk asked to stand by the side of the king, and the others followed.

Inside the house rot ate the doorposts, black grime hung from the walls, and slimy snakes twisted over the floor. This was enough to frighten them, but it was not all. Trolls screamed at the door, and some tossed a goat-skin back and forth, by humping their backs.

Thorkill led them on through a hole at the back of the room, into a cave.

There, high on a narrow ledge, was hunched a giant, his long white beard falling to his waist, pinned to the rock by an iron spear thrust through his body, and three women, gnarled like tree trunks, with their heads on their laps, for they had no backbones.

"Who are these frightful things?" asked Buk.

"Gierrod and his three daughters," answered Thorkill, "pinned here by the great

[198]

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

god Thor, because they dared to thwart him."

When the wayfarers were able to tear their eyes away from Gierrod, they saw on the other side of the cave, seven great kegs, bound with gold, and chained with silver, the gold tipped tusk of a wild beast, a carved staghorn, set in jewels, and a heavy golden armband.

One rash man snatched the armband, one the horn, and one slung the tusk on his shoulder. The armband became a snake, the horn a dragon, and the tusk a sword, which moved without a hand to guide it, and they slew the men who held them.

Shaking with fright, the travellers hurried into a smaller cave where glittered a heap of golden armour, too large for human use, and embroidered cloaks and jewelled belts. Then Thorkill himself could not resist the longing for a cloak, and when he took one up the men fell hand and foot upon the treasure.

But as they touched it, a flash of lightning split the rock, the earth quaked, the three gnarled women shrieked, and the trolls rushed

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

in upon them. By good luck Broder and Buk were armed with slings, and they caught up rocks from the floor of the cave, and let fly right and left. Gorm, Thorkill, Broder, Buk and twenty others fought their way out, but the rest were torn in pieces.

Those who still lived, fled to the river, where they found Gudmund again with his ferry, and again he tried to keep them in his hall. But when they were steadfast, he set them on their way with gifts. Only Buk fell in love with one of the giant maidens, and took her to wife. When the king had gone, Buk gathered his strength and sought to follow in a cart, but his wheels stuck fast in the mud of the river, and the water bore him away.

This was the end of Buk, whom Gorm bewailed. Only enough men to fill one high ship, sailed from that dreadful shore.

As they travelled back they had foul winds, and their food gave out, and Gorm prayed to all the gods in turn, but the winds grew no better. But when at last he sacrificed to


[200]

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

Utgaard Loki, a fair breeze filled the sail.

So the faring was ended, and they came home, having seen the lands they had set out to see, but only fifteen of three hundred, from that journey in search of knowledge of the world, reached their quiet haven.

To Learn of the World That Is To Be

OW Gorm might have rested after his wayfaring, and ended his days in peace, had not some men told him that souls were immortal. Thereafter he vexed himself night and day with wondering where he should go when he died, and whether the gods rewarded a faithful follower.

While he was in this trouble, certain men who wished to see Thorkill put out of the way, came to him, and said,

“Only your own god, Utgaard Loki, can answer your questions, O King, and Thorkill is the very man to find him for you.” For they thought in their hearts that if Thorkill went in search of Utgaard Loki he would never come back.

[202]

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

Gorm called Thorkill, and asked him to undertake the journey.

"I shall obey the king, if he will grant me one boon," answered Thorkill. "Let me take with me on my way the men who first thought of the trip."

At this the plotters tried hard to show the king, that the whole plan had been only a jest, but Gorm saw to it that they sailed with Thorkill in his hide covered ships.

Day after day they sailed, over the water which rings the lands, until they dropped beyond the edge of the world into that place which is not lit by sun nor moon, nor any stars. On this black sea, their fuel gave out, and they had no fire for cooking, and no torch for light. Then they fell sick, of eating their meat raw, and none could tell whether the hunger or the sickness plagued them most. Time and again Thorkill climbed the high mast, straining his eyes into the darkness, and saw nothing.

But at last, though he could not tell

[203]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

whether it was on a day or a night, for all hours were the same, a thin flame spurted in the distance. Guiding his ship in that direction, Thorkill heard his keel grate on a shore. He fastened a jewel to his mast, which would show him the ship by its gleam, and telling his followers to wait, he set off alone in the blackness, toward the faint light of the fire.

The fire shone from a crevice in the rock, and Thorkill, peering in, beheld two dark Nithers in a cave, throwing brush on the flame with noses that were like the horns of a cow.

"Hail!" he said, stepping in undaunted. "Can you say if this be the way to Utgaard Loki?"

"It is a dangerous thing to go in search of a god," said one of the two men with a leer, "yet if you will tell us three truths in the form of sayings, we will show you how to come thither."

Said Thorkill,

"I never saw a house where noses were so ugly."

[204]

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

"I never saw a place where I wanted less to live."

"And whichever foot takes me foremost out of here, will be my best foot, from now on."

The horned nosed Nithers laughed, and answered,

"If you will row straight ahead for four days in the darkness, you will come to the land, where no grass grows, and no light shines, and there is the way to Loki."

"Since such dangers lie before me," said Thorkill, "will you not at least give me some fire to warm me on the way?"

"For that," answered the horned noses, "we will take three more sayings."

Said Thorkill,

"Good advice should be followed, though it come from a bad man."

"I shall have only my good legs to thank if I ever get safely out of here."

"And if I could go away right now, I should never come back."

[205]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Then the horned noses gave him some fire, and he hurried back with it to the ship, following the shine of the jewel in the darkness. On the fourth day, they came to the Grassless land.

When Thorkill felt the high prow grate on the black shore, he sprang out, and bade his men light a fire, so that he could see where they were. He found himself before a high cliff, and squeezed through one little crack, into a cave. The cave was lined with row upon row of iron seats, where snakes slid in and out, and there was a gleam of water before him.

He stepped over the water, followed by his men, and came through two more caves to a room lit by a ghostly light. There lay Utgaard Loki, himself, chained hand and foot to the rock, paying for his sin against Odin.

“Now bear witness to my mighty deed!” cried Thorkill, looking around to make sure that his men were watching him, and he

[206]

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

stepped up to the god, and pulled a hair, as thick as a corn stalk, out of his chin.

But such a smell came from the hair, that Thorkill and his men had to wrap their faces in their cloaks, and rush to the shore, with all the snakes and demons of that place spitting poison after them. All upon whom the poison fell were killed, and only Thorkill and five men, scrambled into the ship, and hid under the ox skins.

When one of the men dared to stick his head out, a drop of poison struck it, and sliced it off as if it had been cut by a sword. Another stretched out a hand and drew it back withered and shriveled. A third only peered around a corner of the hide, and was smitten blind. Still the demons hung in the air over the ship, spitting upon it, and Thorkill began offering prayers to all the gods in turn.

This time when he prayed to the god of the universe, the demons left them, and a kind wind blew them through the darkness

[207]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

until they could begin to tell day from night. At last they found themselves back in the world of men and landed in Germany, where they became Christians.

In the end, strengthened in heart, but so scarred of face that no one knew him, Thorkill came back to Denmark.

When Gorm heard who was there, he was all eagerness to know the answer of his riddle, and he bade Thorkill come to him on the morrow, and tell him what had passed. But there were still some men who wished to be rid of this mighty rover, and they whispered to the king,

"Beware of listening to the tale of Thorkill, for we have had an omen that you will die when you hear it."

"You speak strange words," answered the king, "for I have had a dream warning me of that very thing. Perhaps it would be as well if you went to him tonight, and killed him in his bed."

But Thorkill saw the men whispering to

[208]

THE FAR JOURNEYS OF THORKILL

the king, and thought it boded ill, so he put a log of wood in his bed, and slept elsewhere. In the darkness the king's men came to the room, and slashed at the log of wood, and tip-toed off. Next day Thorkill went cheerfully up to the hall.

The king was so abashed at the sight of him that he did not know which way to look, but Thorkill said,

"Your men did me no harm, so I forgive you. But I must say that you are worse than any of the monsters whom I have met for your sake."

The King blushed, and at first meant to send Thorkill away.

"It is a pity you do not want to hear my tale," said Thorkill, "for it is full of wonders."

"Tell it, then," said the King, with his eagerness for knowledge getting the better of him.

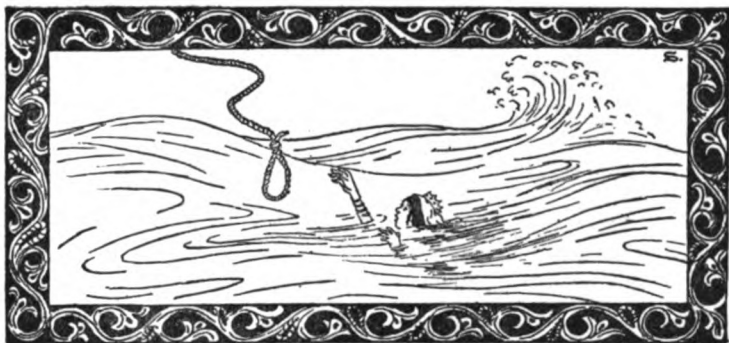
So Thorkill began. But when he came to the part about the filthiness of Loki, and of

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

the way he suffered for his sin, Gorm was so wroth at hearing evil of his own god, that then and there he died of rage.

Thus did Gorm find the answer to his riddle.

THE PERILS OF SIGRID



THE PERILS OF SIGRID

THIS is a tale of Sigrid, Queen of Sweden, who was betrayed by Olaf, King of Norway, and helped by Svend, the King of Denmark.

King Svend sat frowning on his high carved throne, listening to the tale of a rover, lately come from Norway. Thus ran the tale:

“Olaf of Norway has been baptised a Christian, by Bernhart, the English priest, but in secret he still sacrifices to Odin, and Thor, and Frey, and has soothsayers read the future, in the screaming of the birds.”

“This is most evil,” said Svend, for Svend too was a Christian. His youth had been wild,

[213]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

and he had even killed his father in order to get the throne, but after he came there he foreswore the old gods, and was baptised, and thought of this murder as the darkest of all his sins. The tale went on:

“Not only this, but Olaf has betrothed himself to Sigrid, the widowed queen of Sweden. When he joins her land to his own, he will be the greatest king in all the North.”

“Now this is overmuch,” said Svend, with narrowed eyes.

Forthwith he called two trusted men, and bade them sail for Norway.

“When you come there,” he said, “speak ill of me, and say that I cast you forth, but say much to Olaf about my lovely daughter Thyra.”

So the men sailed to Norway, and hiding their boat, came all wild and ragged into Olaf’s hall.

“Take us in, Olaf,” they cried, “for Svend has driven us out of house and home.”

Olaf gave them food and drink, and

[214]

THE PERILS OF SIGRID

listened to them, while they cursed Svend, but at last they sighed, "Bad though Svend is, he has a lovely daughter."

"What are you saying?" asked Olaf, laying down the bone that he was gnawing.

"We but spoke of Thyra as all men speak of her. For she is full of smiles like summer meadows, and fairer than the day."

Olaf weighed these words carefully, and it came to him that it would be just as well to wed a maiden of Denmark, as to waste his youth with a widow of Sweden, so he sent messengers to Svend, and got a kindly answer.

Then Olaf was glad, but he still had to break with Sigrid, so he sent her word to meet him in a ship, on the narrow blue water between her coast and Denmark. Sigrid, fearing no evil, came to the trysting.

The gold-decked ship of Sigrid was high and dark, and the three ships of Olaf were proud, as they swept up. Sigrid sat in a high throne under the mast, with her waiting women about her, and a stout row of fighters

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

at her back, catching the sun on the points of their spears. The ships swayed softly, as a little breeze ruffled the blue water.

Olaf called to Sigrid, and Sigrid called back.

"I cannot hear you for the screaming of the gulls," shouted Olaf, "Come over to my ship, for I have something weighty to say to you."

"I am not a gull, to fly over the water," answered the queen from her throne.

"Let me set a bridge from your ship into mine," called Olaf.

Then ten of his men raised a stout board, and laid it across between his ship and Sigrid's. Sigrid, in her golden crown, with a long white veil over her long blue robe, climbed up, and put a stately foot upon the board. When she was half way over, Olaf and his men jerked it away, and she fell headlong into the sea.

Around and around in the water splashed the queen, with her white veil and her long

THE PERILS OF SIGRID

blue robe floating out behind her, and her salt tears mingled with the little waves that slapped at her golden crown. Olaf and his men, whinnying like horses, rushed to the edge of their ships, and held their sides with laughter, at the sight of a queen in the water.

At last Sigrid's folk managed to throw a rope to her, and draw her out, and her waiting women crowded around her on the deck and taking off her dripping clothes, wrapped her in their veils. By this time the ships of the Norwegians were speeding away over the blue water, and a sound of mocking laughter floated back from them.

But when Sigrid was dried and rested, she thought over what had happened, and she was very angry.

Olaf made ready to send after Thyra, and Svend laid a deep plan, but Sigrid walked brooding through her halls, and her heart was cold with hatred of Olaf.

One day as she walked proudly through her woods, followed by her waiting women,

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

a beggar lay in the narrow path, and whined, "Svend loves thee."

Sigrid did not turn her head, but gathered her skirts away from him, and passed on. She took care, however, to come back by the same way. The beggar was still lying in the path, and again he whined,

"Svend loves thee."

Again Sigrid did not turn her head, as she passed with a stately step, but she said to herself, loud enough for the beggar to hear, "I love him who loves me."

When the light of her blue robe was gone amidst the trees, the beggar sprang up, and hurried off to Svend with this answer.

A few days after there was a great feast in the court of Sweden, for Svend, king of Denmark, had come to ask for the hand of the queen. He strode up the hall, followed by a band of his stoutest men, dressed in a red mantle, over his shining armour, and wearing a jewelled crown.

Sigrid rose to greet him, covered with

THE PERILS OF SIGRID

golden brooches and rings, and gave him mead in a golden cup. When he had made his offer, she said,

"I will be your wife, O King of Denmark, and bring you Sweden as my dower, if you will do one thing." Then there was silence in the hall, and all listened, as the queen went on in a stifled voice, "Do not let Olaf wed your daughter Thyra."

"There is no fear of that," said Svend, "for my daughter shall have a husband who knows how to keep faith."

Then Sigrid and Svend were wed with such pomp as had never been seen before, and when Olaf sent men for the hand of Thyra, Svend took off their clothes and sent them back to him naked.

When Olaf saw that he had not only lost the Swedish ally, whom he had betrayed, but the Danish one as well, and that his mocking of one bride had cost him the other, he was filled with shame and wrath, and made war upon Svend.

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Svend gathered all the Swedes and the Danes to meet him, and slew him on the spot. Then Svend was king over the Norwegians, and forgave their having come against him, and ruled them kindly.

So Svend lived, fearing God continually and seriously, to a peaceful old age, and a quiet death, and Sigrid bore him a son, whom they called Canute. Canute grew up to be the strongest of all Denmark's kings, for he ruled Vendam, Sembeland, England, Norway, Scotland, and another kingdom, all at once.

A VIKING'S DEATH



A VIKING'S DEATH

IN the days of the Vikings many a rover gave himself the name of king, though he ruled no country. Such a one was called a Sea King, for his kingdom was his ship, and he raided and plundered all his days, never sleeping under roof, nor resting by the fireside.

No sea king was more renowned than Hagen, for he overcame the king of Sweden, and seized the country for himself, but when he had dwelt in quiet for three years, taking pleasure in the broad land won by his sword, his followers grew weary of long peaceful days, and left him.

[223]

THE SWORDS OF THE VIKINGS

Then Jorund and Erik, Erik Arleson's sons, bestirred themselves, gathered their men, and came against King Hagen.

They met at Forresvold, under the morning sun. Throughout the day, King Hagen led his men where the fighting was hardest. He split the helms of his foe, till he came face to face with Erik, and smote him, shouting. Jorund fled to his ships, and afternoon brought quiet at Forresvold.

But with the twilight, Hagen felt his strength go from him through his wounds. Therefore he called his men.

"Put all the broken helms and swords in my ship," he said, "and the men, who have fought their last fight. Heap wood from the forest about them, and lay me in their midst under the high mast, upon a bed of straw, for I shall die a death befitting a Sea King."

When the wind was blowing seaward, and the sun had set, the sails of the ship were hoisted, and the helm was put alee, that the



*So passed King Hagen into the open ocean, and the
long blue summer night . . .*

A VIKING'S DEATH

dark rocks might be passed, and the bright
fire was brought to the wood.

So passed King Hagen, on his flaming ship,
out of the knowledge of men, into the open
ocean, and the long blue summer night.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



3 9015 02408 5154



RECEIVED

RECEIVED

